



CULTIVATOR: PACIFIC TONGUES EDUCATORS' GUIDE

to cultivating an active artistic Oceanic community of writers, spoken word performers, leaders, educators and students of all ages.

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by Melvin Won Pat- Borja and Jason Mateo

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Introduction

There are three words that comprise the theme of this educator's guide, each of which we believe is an essential part of the work that Pacific Tongues engages in with young people in our communities: *identity, representation, and empowerment*. Not only do these words weigh heavy on us as Pacific Islanders, but also as educators, artists, activists, and parents. Pacific Tongues is a non-profit organization that cultivates an active artistic Oceanic community of writers, spoken word performers, leaders, educators and students of all ages. Our commitment is to honor the practice of *kuleana* through creative workshops, public events and pedagogical development. It is our vision to provide a safe and central location in the Hawaiian Islands to facilitate a cross-cultural exchange within Pacific influenced populations through Spoken Arts Education.

This project will address how Spoken Arts Education can be used as a tool for young Pacific Islander students to: create a positive and culturally conscious sense of identity, play an active role in how they are represented in text and in the media, and empower them to create positive change in their lives and in their communities. We want this educator's guide to help other Pacific Islanders to create localized and indigenized, sustainable Spoken Arts Education movements in their respective communities around the Pacific region. This educator's guide is a collection of narratives that share how we have been able to use our pedagogy to promote critical thinking, public speaking, literacy, community involvement, and leadership among young people. We hope that it will illustrate the value of Spoken Arts Education as an effective tool for civic engagement and the educational enrichment of Pacific Islander students.

This educator's guide will not teach you how to build a movement, but serve as a starting point and a reference to help create Spoken Arts Education programming in our neighboring communities across the ocean. We understand that these programs cannot be successful if they are not tailored to fit the needs of the community it is serving, and so this educator's guide is not designed to instruct with specific steps or specific lessons. This guide is meant to model what has been helpful and beneficial to us based on our experiences. We have structured and designed this educator's guide to showcase what we believe is at the core of our pedagogy; the philosophy that drives our programs. The workshops and guidelines are written in a way that allows room for revision, and we encourage you to revise them in a way that makes them suitable for your island. The workshops use a structure that allows the facilitator to easily change the focus

of the writing and discussion. This is done deliberately to create flexibility for the facilitator to adjust it as s/he sees fit. We want our workshops to be changed and altered and adapted to become more relevant and impactful to the young people who will learn them. We even want the format of the slams to be altered to become more culturally appropriate. The section on organizing a poetry slam includes rules for the slam that were adopted from the National Poetry Slam competition, however these rules are just meant to be guidelines. We encourage you to keep the rules that work for your local slam and get rid of the ones that don't. Don't be afraid to do things differently from other slams and explore creative ways to make your event unique to your community.

We have also chosen not to focus on creative writing technique in this guide because we believe that it is important to promote cultural aesthetics of what good writing and speaking looks and sounds like. Though we spend a lot of time editing and revising poems so that they are the best they can be, we also understand that what is considered "good writing" is culturally subjective. Therefore, we believe that it is more important to focus on the emotional and educational parts of the writing process and leave the aesthetic value to be judged by the writer and his/her home community. As native people, it is our right and responsibility to promote and preserve the cultural and artistic aesthetics that we value in our own communities. We encourage you and your community to be the creative authorities on what makes a "good poem." We must be the stewards of our own art, music, and ways of expression. We cannot stress enough the importance of localizing and indigenizing the curriculum so that it can have a meaningful and lasting effect on the community it is meant to serve. Ultimately, it is the passion behind the words, the inspiration behind the lessons, and the community that is created on each island that matters the most.



*Jocelyn Ng and
William Giles
perform at Brave
New Voices 2008
(Photo by Pacific
Tongues)*

2013 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Slam Team: (L-R) Sarah Daniels, Malialina Derden, Tianzhen Nie, and Joanna Gordon (Photo by Pacific Tongues)



Youth poets participate in a Pacific Tongues workshop in Honolulu. (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

History

A poetry slam is a spoken word competition where competitors present pieces of original writing in front of an audience, using no music, no props, and no costumes. The poem is then judged by a panel of 5 judges (usually selected at random from the audience) on a decimal scale from 0 – 10. The low and high scores are dropped and the middle three are added together with 30 points being the highest score possible. Poetry slams are by nature, a call and response show, where audience members are encouraged to cheer (and even boo) the poems that are presented. They are much different from poetry readings, where audience members sit quietly and passively as poems are read by their authors. In a poetry slam, the audience is as much a part of the show as the poets.

Though the work we do with youth poetry slams has become the face of our organization, it is really a small part of who we truly are and what we are invested in as a community of artists and educators. We like to repeat the phrase, “Slam is not the Mecca, it’s the mechanism!” In essence, the poetry slam is our gimmick: it is a way to get people to show up in masses to listen to young poets speak their minds and to celebrate their desire to be publicly critical of their lives and our society. On the surface it looks like kids competing to see who is the best writer or performer, but on a deeper level they are actively engaging their peers and their communities in a passionate way that sparks a cross-cultural, cross-generational exchange.

In 2005, we started a program called Youth Speaks Hawai‘i, which offers free after-school writing workshops and monthly poetry slams for teenagers. The program quickly grew popular among young people and we found ourselves servicing hundreds of teenagers throughout the year. We eventually went on to assemble a team that would represent Hawai‘i at the annual Brave New Voices International Teen Poetry Slam Festival, which gathered over 500 young poets from across America and around the world. Our team was immediately faced with the responsibility of representing the Nation of Hawai‘i and her people. From the beginning we were committed to using this unique opportunity to educate people about the social and political issues facing Hawai‘i and the impact that they have on the native people and their land. It was this particular experience that informed our methodology and our pedagogy; forever changing the way that our program was run.

When we first started doing workshops, we were just trying to teach kids how to write poems. We thought that well-crafted poems were the goal, however we quickly realized that the work had to be more meaningful and impactful in order for it to truly benefit Hawai‘i and her people. We made the determination to use this program to empower young people with lessons that applied critical thinking to promote political consciousness and social justice, which would eventually turn into poems to be performed on stage. But we didn’t want just any poems, we wanted our young people to write informed poetry – to write poetry with a purpose. Having observed young poets and youth poetry programs from around the continental U.S., we found that indigenous islanders responded to the curriculum in a very unique way. It was easy for them, despite the overwhelming literacy gap between them and their continental U.S. counterparts. Many of our students read well below grade level and our standardized test scores are among the lowest in the country. However, the type of writing that was coming out of this community strongly contradicted these statistics. How could these kids be considered illiterate, yet produce such profound poetry? The writing came naturally, despite some reluctance to try, and the poetry they produced was organic and unconventional. It was refreshing to hear poetry that wasn’t recycled or regurgitated from pop



Alaka‘i Kotrys, Alex Lum, Ittai Wong, and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner editing their poetry (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

culture. Their ideas were fresh and truly reflected the climate in their communities. It was amazing to see how many young poets embraced the art form and quickly made it their own.

When we teach a workshop, the majority of the time is spent engaging students in critical discussions about a certain topic or theme. We explore different aspects of the issue and find ways for young people to relate and encourage them to verbalize their opinions and experiences. This is a very important part of the process because it allows them to analyze their ideas and juxtapose them with the ideas of others. After students have had some time to write, we gather as a class and read our poems aloud to the group. This is definitely the most challenging part of the workshop, but also the most important part. The reason we put so much emphasis on this is because it is a way for us to create equal access to language. It is no secret that many classrooms are comprised of students at different academic levels. Though a classroom may be filled with 16-year-old Juniors, they don't all read and write at that grade level. In an environment like this, literature and literacy can become a very divisive thing. It is difficult for students to hand their writing over to their peers, knowing that they don't write at a high level or don't have the same grammar or composition skills as their classmates. It is much easier to *see* a writer's grammatical deficiencies when their work is right in front of you. On the other hand all of these students can think and speak for themselves and when given the opportunity to read their writing aloud, they will often sound clearer and more comprehensible because they read through all their grammatical mistakes, allowing us to hear what they meant to say. This is the beginning of our composition practice. Students effectively create a rough draft of their poems and when given the chance to read them, they are essentially running their poems through a peer review. After this is done, we encourage young people to take their poems home and work on them. In many cases students will revise and rewrite their poems, but this time, they will read aloud to themselves so they can decide whether or not they like how it sounds. The focus on the audible aesthetic is powerful, not only because it helps to improve the writing process, but also because as it shows how connected our young people still are to their oral traditions.

"The slam is not the Mecca, it's the mechanism!" Many people regard the poetry slam as one of the most important things that we do, which isn't surprising given that it is one of the most public aspects of our programming. However internally, we understand that the poetry slam serves a specific purpose and that it is indeed less about the competition and more about how it contributes as part of the process for

young writers. The poetry slam is really a vehicle for young people to transport their voices to a larger audience. It is also a way for them to understand the weight that their words carry and the importance of being responsible and accountable for the things we say and do. During a poetry slam audience members will clap and cheer when they hear something they like, serving as validation for the performers. This could be because they agreed with a certain statement or even just because they liked the way something sounded. On the other hand, audience members may be more reluctant to cheer for something they disagree with; some may even boo (though it is rare at a youth poetry slam). Audience interaction is a great litmus test for young authors to gauge the effectiveness and appeal of their writing (and performance). Additionally, the poetry slam serves as a major motivator for improvement, which in effect, impacts literacy.

Many students who are drawn to the poetry slam have a desire to improve their writing and performance skills. They want to succeed in the slam and so they will work constantly to write better poetry and sharpen their literary skills. This drive often leads young people to read more poetry. It is amazing to see a young poet who was previously a reluctant reader, with his/her face buried in a book. It always starts with reading other poets and eventually finds its way to reading anything and everything. The mere act of reading has such a profound impact on creative process, vocabulary, sentence fluency, and overall writing skill. For many young poets, reading becomes attractive to them simply because they want to get better at writing. In our conversations with teachers and parents, it is clear that writing poetry has had a positive academic impact on so many students.

Though we do our best to de-emphasize the competitive element of poetry slams, we do not deny that the competition also holds value. The energy and hype created by poets who are engaged in a war of words is incredibly infectious and using this energy can be extremely motivating for a young person to be at their best. Writing poetry is a solitary act and young writers need motivation quite often. Some respond to the audience and the thrill of the stage, some like the respect and recognition, while others just want to be validated by a room full of strangers. Whatever the case, the competition can definitely push a young poet to work hard at writing and revising and practicing and performing. We do not believe that writing and performing poetry should ever be about “who is the best,” but we also recognize that there is something valuable about how poetry slams “bring out the best” from a lot of poets.

The desire to become skilled orators coupled with the opportunity to address an audience through the poetry slam, ultimately results in the empowerment of young people to improve literacy skills and a medium that allows them to be heard. When viewed from this perspective, it is clear that the poetry slam is truly the mechanism and not the Mecca. The focus is not merely the competition or the hype, but more so the process that it catalyzes. The poetry slam serves as a way to capture the interest and imagination of young people. Additionally, we believe that young Pacific Islanders gravitate toward this medium because like most disenfranchised people, Pacific Islanders are rarely listened to. Many of our young people have watched their parents and grandparents systematically silenced and they have been taught that their voices are insignificant. But that does not stop people from speaking their beliefs and mediums such as these, break the hierarchical paradigm of what poetry is and what it should be, which essentially brings poetry back to the people.

The poetry slam has served as a gateway to the empowerment of the Pacific Islander voice for many of our youth poets. Jamaica Osorio, Jocelyn Ng, Ittai Wong, and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, are four prime examples of this. All four poets began competing in poetry slams on the local and national level and each poet has since taken their work to address a much larger audience. Jamaica Osorio was invited to perform at the White House, Jocelyn Ng has performed at the Hawai'i State Capitol, Ittai Wong has performed on Broadway, and Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner performed at the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Each writer began as a teenager in our program and each excelled in the poetry slam scene, however their poetry did not stop at winning slams. After graduating from high school, each of these young people went on to earn Bachelors degrees from accredited institutions. Most importantly, all of them have returned to work in their home communities. We will speak more about these poets late in the educator's guide.

Poetry slams are a powerful tool, but they are not the answer to all of our problems. They are simply a mechanism that leads to a process of change. Watching the ways that our students have grown and progressed through their academic and professional careers, make us confident that our program works, however we also understand that it was the poetry slam that got their attention in the first place. We are committed to capturing the imaginations of our young people and using this particular medium as an agent for change. But we are not naïve to believe that poetry slams will change the world. We know that the poetry slam must be backed up with pedagogy that is rooted in social justice and liberation. This is why we

are committed to developing workshops and curriculum that compliment the shows, but ultimately result in socially and politically conscious writing from our youth.



Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner shares a provocative statement through a spoken word poem to address the United Nations for a climate change summit. (Photo from <http://www.un.org/climatechange/summit/>)



Jamaica Osorio with President Obama at White House Evening of Poetry, Music, Spoken Word (Photo by Chuck Kennedy for the White House; <http://jacket2.org/commentary/there-anyone-out-there>)

Educational Component by Melvin Won Pat- Borja

The educational component of this project is something that is very important to me because I come from a family of educators and I have also been an educator for about 10 years. It is our belief that Spoken Arts Education possesses real value for the educational enrichment of Pacific Islander students because of its roots in oral tradition. We understand our communities to be made of “oral” and “aural” people, meaning that we learn things by what we hear and what we speak. Traditionally, people across the region have learned their histories, genealogies, and even their stereotypes through spoken language. Furthermore, written language is relatively new to Pacific Islanders, which partially helps explain the achievement gap between our students and their western counterparts. In an educational system that places so much emphasis on reading and writing, it is no wonder that our kids are underachieving especially when so many of them read below grade level. It is our hope that this educator’s guide will serve as a measuring stick to show the value of Spoken Arts Education in our communities and how a focus on representation, identity, and empowerment through spoken arts, can promote literacy, confidence, critical thought, and leadership among young people.

In my personal experience working with young adults both in after-school programming and in the public school system (in Guåhan and Hawai‘i), I have observed the impact that this art form and pedagogy can have on the young people who embrace it. I have worked with a wide range of students who are all over the academic spectrum. What has moved me the most is the way that many of our students, who have been labeled remedial, have managed to achieve academic success at a very high level. As I mentioned earlier, a vast majority of our students read below grade-level. This singular factor is detrimental to the success of any student in a western school system because reading is such a fundamental and functional part of their learning process. When we factor in other challenges such as money, resources, time, facilities, quality instruction, materials, and support at home, we are left with a very grim picture of our students’ perpetual failure. Though we may not address all of these issues, we believe that we tackle the major ones that hold our young people back.

Like most of our youth, I spent many years struggling with my identity and searching for someone to relate to. I hated school and I hated reading. Every author that was shoved down my throat as a kid had

three things in common: they were all old (or dead), they were all males, and they were all white. I could not identify with any of them, let alone their writing. It was difficult for me to connect with the writers we studied in school because I always felt like I could never be like them. It's funny how when you talk to kids in Guåhan about their dreams and aspirations, no one ever says they want to be president. It's because they know that politically this is an impossibility, so why even bother? The same holds true for academia. We don't look or sound like any of those people we read in our schoolbooks, so what's the point? It is not that our kids cannot do the work or even that they are uninterested or unmotivated, they simply do not see the point because it isn't common to see someone who looks like them become successful or stand in a position of power through education. Coming back home to teach in Guåhan, I was often confronted with these sentiments in the way that many students treated me. When I started teaching at Southern High School, (my alma mater), I was immediately embraced by the school population. At first I thought it was just because I was the young teacher who wore sneakers and baggy slacks and I could rap, but later I realized that it was because they saw me as one of them. I was a rare success story, someone who came from where they come from, experienced what they were experiencing, but still managed to be critical and intelligent and more importantly, successful (at least in their eyes) because as their teacher, I was in a position of power. I believe that this fundamental misunderstanding is a huge factor in why we are failing our young people. They need leaders and role models and people that they can believe in. They need to know that they are not small and insignificant. They need to know that their histories are rich and full of life and meaning. They need other Pacific Islander voices, which is why this movement is so important because we are bringing marginalized voices to the core. We are taking a community that has been marginalized for generations into the forefront and allowing them to tell their own stories. The poetry slam serves as that profound moment where these voices are honored and revered, and in many ways validated as being important and significant. Furthermore, this movement will undoubtedly play an integral role in making Pacific Islander voices more present and prominent in the classroom because we are essentially creating a generation of young writers who will one day flood the canon with Pacific Islander stories and perspectives. This is how we plan to represent ourselves for our children in the future, but it must begin with identity.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned in recreating the success of our movement in Hawai‘i was taught to me in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He makes the point that education must not only be appropriate, but relevant to the people it aims to educate. Students will never be interested in learning about a system of government that oppresses them and how it systematically holds them back. They will never respond to an education that reinforces the idea that they must let go of who they really are and assimilate in order to succeed. They *will* however, pay attention if you're teaching them how to tear that same system down. The point is that education must provide students with knowledge that is functional. As an organization, we apply this philosophy to our training, development, and support of other movements around the region. It is imperative that we are able to localize and even indigenize our curriculum so that it will be relevant to the young people we intend to serve. One of the difficult things to do in the beginning was to accept that things would be different in Hawai‘i than they were in San Francisco. Guåhan would be different from Hawai‘i, Saipan would be different from Guåhan, Palau would be different from Saipan and so on. We had to become committed to the idea that, like poetry slams, this work had to be an ongoing conversation -- something that was living and breathing and constantly evolving. Though we strongly believe that this philosophy is critical for the success of these movements in their local communities, it also makes things very complicated and very difficult.

Ideally, we want to preserve the integrity and quality of our pedagogy and programing and toward that effort, standardizing our best practices would seem like the way to go. However, that is a very western approach to education that hasn't been very successful in our region (or in any community with people of color). Our local governments (in Guahān and Hawai‘i) have spent millions of dollars investing in the next best thing that will improve the quality of education in our schools. The reality is that these programs are cookie cutters, not built with our demographics in mind. We are committed to working with Pacific communities in a way that puts their needs first by cultivating local and indigenous leadership.

When I was working in Palau, I expressed this idea to some of the leaders I had a chance to meet with. They were all very welcoming to the idea and many of them even seemed surprised. At one meeting I specifically remember saying, "We are willing to support Palau in anyway that we can by providing training and support and sharing our resources and experiences, but this movement must be spearheaded by Palauans. It has to be one of you who will take the helm and make it work here. If not, then it's just gonna

be another outsider coming into your island, telling you what to do and how to do it.” Later that night one of my Palauan friends said that some of the leaders were shocked to hear me speak that way because when they think ‘outsider’ they don’t think of someone who looks like me. However I was truthful and honest because even as an indigenous islander, in Palau, I *am* an outsider, therefore I must learn before I can teach. I had to take time to brush up on some Palauan history and cultural practices before I started working with the young people. I made sure that our curriculum was culturally sensitive and more importantly culturally relevant. I made sure that in our workshops, I was *facilitating* instead of teaching, making deliberate effort to talk *with* them instead of *at* them -- I wanted *them* to teach me, which validates their cultural, ancestral, and political knowledge. However despite my efforts, I still had a ceiling on what I was able to do. I recognized that it was far more effective for me to share our pedagogy with native Palauan educators because they are better fit to teach their own community than I ever could hope to be. This is the fundamental difference between us, and the western school system. The power rests in the hands of those receiving the education and those who should benefit from it. This type of commitment to localize and indigenize the curriculum definitely made things difficult, however we believe it is also what makes it extremely effective.



Melvin Won Pat-Borja at the 2014 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Grand Slam Finals (Photo <https://www.facebook.com/tookHNLA/>)

Community Component by Jason Mateo

The community component of this education guide is important to me because of the impact that my community has had on me as a teen poet. Growing up in a broken household, raised by family outside of my parents, it was hard to find a place where I felt that I belonged. Many Pacific youth face this same challenge of feeling displaced or in search of a group in which they have a bond. We believe that through spoken word poetry, our youth have a greater chance at being part of a community where their voice matters. In a classroom, our voices, time, and opinions are regulated. Although we see Spoken Arts Education as a valuable way of enhancing a student's knowledge base and how they learn at school, we also recognize the possibilities when our students are not limited to the rules of a classroom. A school is supposed to be a safe place, so there are restrictions that prevent our students from expressing themselves completely. In many ways school standards are more farfetched for our students than the code of the community. Not all classrooms have consideration for local youth culture, whereas our programming in the community is heavily influenced by young people's lives outside of the campus. Through this educator's guide, we will provide tools for Pacific communities to cultivate youth artists and leaders from their respective communities to create their own spoken arts programming. Moreover, this guide will encourage young poets to envision themselves as more than just performers, but as leaders who feel empowered to be civically engaged for social change.

I have been providing spoken arts workshops for community organizations and in after-school programs for 15 years. I have worked with youth in juvenile detention centers, heritage-based clubs, and at youth centers throughout the world. I am highly impressed by how "at-risk" youth take advantage of programming from Pacific Tongues. Youth who are considered "at-risk" are typically tracked to be prisoners or blue-collar workers (if they are given any motivation at all). Factor in their poor reading level and their everyday struggle, and we get many of our young people who fall through the cracks. We don't save lives like a doctor, but we believe that we facilitate impactful workshops and events in the community that promote excellence from our youth.

Excellence comes in many forms when participating in our workshops. Our workshops are filled with a diverse bunch of young people who are of different ages, heritages, economic status, sexual orientation, writing and performing levels. Some start off with little to no experience in spoken word,

poetry, or even community engagement. Most gain the confidence to write critically, brave an audience to present themselves publicly, and find a larger sense of their role in their community. Although our Poet Facilitators are seasoned performers and have been certified by Pacific Tongues to lead workshops, it is the young participants who set the bar of excellence. I have seen the quietest boy given the opportunity to write, creatively, about his opinion and experience, and have some of the most profound things to say. I have also seen the toughest girl in the community take a workshop and find herself crying in relief, sharing what she wrote. It is through these experiences that Spoken Arts Education becomes valuable in our youth's growth. We facilitate a couple hours in day, where young people, most times without purpose, break language and cultural barriers. In our workshops, young people find their voice, find their identity, and find a community.

We like to talk about the poetry slam not being the mecca, but the mechanism. I believe this to be true because the process in creating the poem to be shared on the stage happens in workshops. I believe that these workshops are the "promise land." It is the journey that we take with our youth outside of the classroom that is the heart of our work. Paulo Friere writes about praxis, which is putting action to our words. Our organization advocates critical writing and poised performances, but in turn we hold each person accountable to the words they choose to use. For young people, our words mean everything. What we promise, what we promote, and what we say is taken to heart by our young people. The community setting that we create would not work if the young people and their families who are invested in participating did not trust our team. There are too many times where our students are disappointed in a school system that does not follow through with their promises. We usually interact with students who lack trust in adults and schools. We regain their trust by finding ways to understand who they are, recognizing them for who they are, and keeping their wants and needs as part of our organization's direction.

In school, our students are expected to passively absorb information and perform at their best. Whereas, at our workshops students are challenged to answer critical questions, are validated by what they do and do not know, and are surrounded by peers who inspire excellence. This is the culture that leads into our poetry slams which is why the environment of our youth competition is filled with love. When each youth poet reaches the stage, they perform with such intensity that the competition is relevant. However, as

soon as they're done performing, the competitors sitting in the audience are the first to embrace the youth poet and honor their bravery. This culture starts at the workshops.

When workshopping with youth from Micronesia at a community center in Pālolo on the island of O'ahu, I guided a historically quiet group into a day of reflection, writing, and growth. What started off as a small group of 5, quickly turned into a larger group of 15, after setting my ground rules for the workshops. Usually rules would make students run the other way, but our rules have the youth in mind. My first rule was, there are no wrong answers. Which means that they can write in whatever language they want, they can spell how they want, and they share their honest opinion. My second rule was, the standard is you. I informed everyone that I do not expect them to be the next Shakespeare, Jay-Z, or Maya Angelou. Who they are coming into the workshop on that day was the new standard. Without emphasizing on respect, every student participated with the highest level of respect that a teacher could ask for in middle school students. The center's counselors were surprised on how respectful their students were when given these rules. They were in even more shock after the workshop. There was a young man who wrote about his grandmother, and all that she had done for him. He expressed how much he missed her after her passing and paid tribute to her lessons that had helped him become who he was on the day of the workshop. This tough, smiling, young man busted into tears after reading his poem. Without any guidance from me, or Kathy (the co-facilitator), the other students comforted him with hugs, hands on the shoulder and praise. Like I have seen in many of our workshops, this young boy started a trend with this group of students. I asked for volunteers to read their writing and this young man was the first and only one to volunteer. After his poem, more students found the courage to share their poems. Their writing made them vulnerable, but also made them strong and more united as a community. These young people are the most recent immigrants to Hawai'i, which means that they are also the most misunderstood group in public schools. Finding their way through a new culture and the stereotypes placed upon them, these young people are adapting. However, they vividly remember their homeland, and with great sincerity, miss their old lifestyle. The most profound thing for me, was the masks that each student came into the workshop with and how they were courageously peeled back the layers to reveal a true sense of self.

The #1 fear in America is public speaking, and Pacific Islanders have a rich legacy of oral traditions. Since the introduction of western culture, we are witnessing more Pacific Islanders being

silenced. In today's society, young people representing themselves and being supported by their peers, family, and community is imperative to their future success. In turn, youth representing their own voice and writings immediately engages their interest in learning and teaching. In the Pacific, we know that learning and teaching does not just happen in the classroom. The purpose of this educator's guide is not to come up with answers, but to facilitate a cross-cultural conversation within Pacific influenced populations through spoken arts. Studying Pacific leaders, students, writers, and performers through practice and presentation will create an active Oceanic community.

From our relationships with Aotearoa, Guåhan, Saipan, Palau, Philippines and the United States of America, we recognized the want and need of a youth spoken arts movement with Pacific influenced populations. We are essentially facilitating the chance for our youth to be actively engaged in social change. Through this art form and public performance space, they have the opportunity to turn their practice into praxis. Furthermore, the civic responsibility that comes with public speaking is immediately felt as students are placed in a position where they must be responsible and accountable for their words and ideas. This is the essence of spoken arts and our Pacific Tongues pedagogy. Our words must reflect our actions and our actions must be backed by our words. This is a difficult lesson to learn, but one that can have a profound impact on young people. Educators, artists and youth organizers in these local communities will have an opportunity to understand our pedagogy and be provided with a network to help build their own youth spoken arts programming that is localized. Our pedagogy is able to adapt to the environment in which we are serving, we believe that our program is culturally sensitive, and we are committed to indigenizing our curriculum and practices to best serve its community.

*Jason Mateo at the 2014
Youth Speaks Hawai'i
Grand Slam Finals
(Photo by
<https://www.facebook.com/tookHNLA/>)*



Identity

“Self-expression is a prerequisite to self-respect.”

-Albert Wendt (from Towards a New Oceania)

As a kid, I got good grades because my parents valued education and insisted that my sisters and I did well in school. I worked hard and understood what I was being taught, but I felt disconnected from my education, especially from the literature. I was a decent reader and my comprehension skills were satisfactory, but I had trouble connecting and relating to the literature that we read in school. So when it came time to write my own stories, essays, or poems, I felt like my experiences were insignificant, unintelligent, and even irrelevant. In essence, I felt irrelevant; my sense of identity left me feeling out of place in this western school system. This sort of experience in school is not uncommon among Pacific Islanders. I was made very aware of this during my first year of teaching at a public high school in Hawai‘i.

I met Lawrence when I was a student-teacher at Kalani High School, in Hawai‘i. I recognized his Chamoru last name, as his teacher butchered it, while taking role. He was a stocky kid, unshakably defiant and completely uninterested in school. Like many other students, he seemed to be at school because he had to be. Lawrence skipped class often, and when he did show up, he was uninterested and disconnected. I introduced myself and asked if he was from Guåhan. He seemed surprised and told me that his dad was Chamoru but that he grew up in Hawai‘i and had never been to Guåhan. Maybe I saw a lot of my younger self in him or maybe it was just because he was the only other Chamoru in school, but Lawrence and I quickly became friends. I would share stories of home and he would listen to them as though he was trying to piece together a history that had he had lost a long time ago. Lawrence was always in and out of trouble with the school administration and other teachers, and he often expressed that school “wasn’t for” him.

I tried my best to keep Lawrence out of trouble. Some days I would let him skip in my class so that he wouldn’t get caught leaving campus and other days I would talk him down from going off on a teacher. He began to see my class as a safe haven, a sort of sanctuary where he could find some peace from the other teachers who did not understand him. However the following year, I got hired by the Hawai‘i Department of Education and officially became a teacher at Kalani High School. Lawrence was enrolled in my 11th grade English class and suddenly I was faced with the dilemma of actually teaching this young man

and not just counseling him. I realized that I had to change my approach in order to make the material relevant to him and give him a chance to succeed in my class.

I immediately began to engage him with writing that I felt he could relate to. I used a lot of Hip Hop and poetry by authors who shared a similar background. I also had him write a lot about himself. This was by far, the most effective tool in engaging his imagination and interest. Writing his own story, filled Lawrence with a sense of empowerment. He was earning a grade for telling his story. This made him feel as though his story was important; it made him feel like I valued his experiences. For a young Pacific Islander like Lawrence, this was a revelation. He had spent years learning that his experiences were insignificant and that the experiences of others (unlike him) were the only things worth learning. For students like Lawrence, learning about their identity is not only crucial for academic success, but it also provides the foundation for a healthy sense of self.

“unfit”

by Melvin Won Pat-Borja

On Monday mornings I drag my lazy butt out of bed

and prep my head for another day without a dollar

I wrap my words in compassion

to create scholars out of students

who are hungry enough to meet me in the middle

And then there's Lawrence:

Five foot six, about 190 pounds

plus the weight of the world on his back

He looks a lot bigger than he is

The other kids either fear him or respect him

He is like family I've never met

A long lost relative divided by opportunities

He is proud like our people have always been

Brown skin that blends like earth

Brown eyes that bend to no one

He is 16 years of defiant aggression

Born with everything to prove and

my lessons fall on ears deafened and disillusioned

by low expectations and premature violence -

a descendent of warriors:

thick flesh wraps wide palms and

flat knuckles to form fists fit for breaking,

but when open, they offer gentle security

he is a walking contradiction

just like me

and I hate the similarity

It makes me feel weak and incompetent
I know that he was sent to me for a reason
but sometimes I still question my ability to teach
Some days I preach hysterically
and wonder why no one listens
Some days I feel like I am running a marathon
by doing the cha-cha:
I am moving, but not forward
Lawrence looks at me like a friend in need
I study the insides of my eyelids
searching for answers to give him
and I keep coming up empty
he is searching for sympathy in me,
a hand out, some charity
because we are both bred from the same bloodline
pump pressure
the veins,
like vines
It reminds me
why I'm here:
I want to help him
plant hope inside his ear
like a seed that he can hear
to remind him that we were more than just warriors
We are one of the oldest civilizations in the pacific
but sometimes explicit screams louder than dreams
and my patience is busting at the seams
He is as stubborn as a hangnail

playing hangman with butterfly knives
and gram bags of weed stuffed in deep pockets
with shallow vision and half-baked ambition
I'd be a liar if I said I've never packed a weapon
or gotten high
Which is why sometimes,
I just wanna take him out back,
and slap the crap out of him
My patience snaps
like guitar strings under the weight
of heavy metal-thunder clap
and just like that,
We
are
identical -
typical brown,
Pacific Islander
drowned in his own anger
push panic
to automatic
crabs-in-a-bucket syndrome
and here we are,
locked expressionless
I second-guess myself twice
and give advice that I never listened to
I've fallen face first flat into fallacy
just to see the bottom
I've gotten caught up in my own racial profile

more than once
and I wonder what gives me the right
to lend this young man even a little bit of advice?
Besides, these days, I'm not too big to admit
that I'm a piece of shit like the rest of them
I smoke colonial cigarettes
and teach poetic politics like a hypocrite
A part-time participant and example-setter
when it's convenient
these students need me like
Ozzy Osbourne needs a double dose of heroin
I am not the answer
Just another problem
with problems overflowing
like garbage from the idiot tube
when our leaders lube their nuclear weapons
in preparation to screw the world
What makes me any different than them?
But what I *do* know,
is that someone stood up for me,
so that I could return the favor
because if no one ever taught me
how to stand up for myself,
like I had a forest fire underneath my behind,
I would have stopped,
dropped,
rolled over and died
a long time ago

So Lawrence,
I may not be the role model that you need
But I will carry you barefoot across the desert
in search of a heater
Because I'm more than just your teacher -
I am family.
And you are not heavy,
you are my brother.

In this poem, I struggled with my emotional attachment and investment in this particular student and the system that oppresses so many young people who are just like him. This poem helps to illustrate not only our pedagogical approach, but it also draws from my personal experience as an educator reflected in this artistic (poetic) representation. In essence, this poem serves as a model for the artistic engagement that our poet facilitators or mentors use in the classroom and why this method is effective in our system. The poem reveals not only a very personal experience, but it also analyzes my thoughts and feelings about the situation through an artistic (but more importantly, a critical) lens. It is written stylistically and structurally like a poem but it is basically a personal narrative.

One of the first things we do with young writers in order to begin the writing process, is we engage them in creating their own personal narratives. We often use standard personal narrative techniques like focusing on significant life experiences or reflecting upon lessons learned. However, we encourage our young writers to write in a way that is comfortable and rewarding for them. Students will often elect to write poetry or raps or stories, but some students will write songs and others will write something that sounds a lot like a journal entry. Regardless of stylistic choices, students are engaging in critical thinking and the creative process. They are being critical of themselves and their experiences, while finding creative ways to convey these messages to their audience. They do all of this while reinforcing a positive sense of self by strengthening their identities as individuals and members of their respective communities. We do this to celebrate their histories, backgrounds, and experiences in an attempt to validate their place in their education.

In the example above, I am not only reflecting on this experience, but I am trying to make sense of it. This is something that many teenagers struggle with. We know that they will be challenged and we want them to be tested, but we also want them to find some level of success and feel like they are capable of writing well. This is why we begin with the personal narrative. Many young people who come through our program are facing a very confusing and challenging part of their lives. They have a lot of questions and have a sense of uncertainty about the future; they are still learning how to live at this point. We believe that the one thing that these kids know best is the way they feel and what got them to that point. More often than not, simply analyzing their experiences and reflecting on them and then turning that critical lens

on themselves can be a very enlightening process, especially for young Pacific Islanders who have been historically made to feel insignificant and inferior.

In a typical classroom setting, one of our poet facilitators would begin the lesson by “busting” a poem - they would perform for the class a poem of their own creation. Our poet facilitators are trained, experienced poets who will make an artistic and professional choice about an appropriate poem to perform. Oftentimes, our poet facilitators will present a poem that is personal and analyzes an aspect of their lives or a situation through a critical lens. The attached poem is one that I would typically use in a classroom or at a school assembly. I believe that it works for several reasons: it is performed and not read (I recite it from memory), it is critical of society, it includes my voice and perspective, and it is socially relevant to them.

The first and probably most important aspect of this work is that we perform the poetry. It is not passively presented to them, printed quietly on a page. Our poetry is alive; it lives and breathes and moves and makes noise! Some poems are loud and in your face, some are heartfelt and emotional, but all of them are spoken and performed for the audience to experience. This particular dynamic engages the students in a way that is so visceral, that many of them respond physically and therefore become active participants in the learning and sharing of knowledge. They are engaging in their education through the oral tradition. Fundamentally, these poems are our stories. No different from the legends, myths, and histories that have been passed to us from generation to generation. In a western school system, we are trained to use written language as the primary vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge and information. We believe that Spoken Arts Education bridges the gap by allowing Pacific Islander students to engage in literacy through the things that they hear and the things that they speak. By embracing the oral tradition, we are providing Pacific Islander students an alternative route to academic success.

On a pedagogical level, even the topic of the poem, in and of itself, is fundamentally critical to the effectiveness in the classroom in that it explores a topic that is relevant to many young people. In *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere writes, “For the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student, the program content of education is neither a gift nor an imposition— bits of information to be deposited in the students—but rather the organized, systematized, and developed "re-presentation" to individuals of the things about which they want to know more” (93). By using things that are attractive and more

importantly, relevant to the student, we can engage them in ways that most teachers would think impossible. The issue is not that the students do not want to learn, it's that they aren't being taught things that interest them or things that they consider useful. Education must be relevant to the student. This is why our poet facilitators use original poetry in spoken form, because it creates a relevant connection between student and facilitator.

In addition to the academic connection, poet facilitators must develop a sense of trust and mutual respect in the classroom. Western classrooms are structured with hierarchies: teacher up front and students seated in rows. The structure places teachers as the authority and students are only allowed to receive knowledge but they don't necessarily participate in the generation of that knowledge. This implies that students are mere receptacles, which is extremely dehumanizing, something that has been done to us for generations especially in education. In the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere also writes, "Men and women who lack humility (or have lost it) cannot come to the people, cannot be their partners in naming the world. Someone who cannot acknowledge himself to be as mortal as everyone else still has a long way to go before he can reach the point of encounter. At the point of encounter there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know" (90). This exemplifies our approach to the "student-teacher" relationship. We deliberately call our staff "facilitators" instead of teachers because we feel that it is important for the classroom to be a safe and equal place for students to learn. Using this distinction, we try to facilitate critical conversations instead of lecturing and preaching information. In addition to creating a dynamic classroom setting, this allows our facilitators to create a layered and meaningful relationship with students, which embraces them in a more holistic sense, as complex individuals with unique stories and backgrounds. This approach disrupts the hierarchy and makes room for trust and growth.

Youth poets participate in a Pacific Tongues workshop in Honolulu (Photo by Pacific Tongues)



Malialina Derden reads a poem at a Pacific Tongues workshop (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

Identity Workshop

The objective of the identity workshops is to facilitate a 3-tiered process exploring our own identities. The tiered process will pull from personal experiences exposing how we perceive ourselves, how others perceptions impact who we think we are, and how we want to be identified. The 3 tiers are segments that break up the writing, but when read together, can form the first draft of a poem.

Start off the workshop with a poem. A poem of your own, if you have one. Read the poem out loud with conviction. Worst case scenario, play a video of one of our students on our website (www.pacifictongues.org).

Step #1: Introduce ground rules- No wrong and the standard is yourself. Explain what each rule means to you and exemplify it where it is appropriate.

Step #2: Have a conversation about what a palette is. I've had many answers for this. A palette is a wooden palette, your taste buds, and painter's palette. The painter's palette is the best example of what we are going to do in this workshop. I define a palette as a surface that holds the mediums in which an artist uses to create a masterpiece. A painter's medium is paint. A writer's medium is words. Now, start the first tier.

TIER I:

Begin creating a pallet of words on the board. Put the word IDENTITY at the top center of the whiteboard. Write down the first words that the students think of when they see the word. I tend to let the room get chaotic at this time and write down all the words that I can, and as fast as I can. When the words start slowing down or getting repetitive, I like to insert guiding questions to encourage more words.

Guiding Questions:

What is your identity at home?

Is your identity different at school? What is your identity at school?

How do other's define your identity? Who/what do they say you are?

Who/what do *you* say you are?

What or who informs your identity?

Does your identity change for your teachers and your friends? How?

Although some students might answer in phrases, do your best to put their phrase into a word without dismissing what they said. When the board is full of words and all questions have been exhausted, and then read every word placed on the board. This is a public palette created by all the brilliant minds in the room. After reading all the words out loud, have the students pick 5 words at random. I like to give them 10 seconds to write down 5 words. It encourages the students to use their instincts.

When the students have written down their 5 words, then we begin the freewrite process. A Pacific Tongues freewrite has rules, as follows:

1. Timed process- Give the students a time limit in which they will be writing. Do not stop writing until the timer is complete.
2. Forward motion- No erasing or going back at all. If the student decides they want to write a different sentence or word, then write it next to the word or sentence that they completed. Encourage students to write what comes to mind and not to focus on spelling, punctuation, or other grammar rules.
3. Be in the moment- if the student gets stuck in the middle of writing. Then write about getting stuck in their writing and have it lead back into what they were originally writing about.

4. Circle 3 of the 5 words- Out of the 5 words, have the students circle 3 of the 5 that they relate most to or use more often.
5. Use a prompt to begin the writing. Since we are talking about Identity, we suggest that the prompt is “I am not who they think I am...”

When the students are done with Tier I, and then have them draw a line underneath their writing and move on to Tier II.

Tier II

Write down 3 moments, in their life, that has informed, created or influenced their identity. Write down the moment and how that moment has informed, created, or influenced their identity. Give them an example of a moment in your life that has informed, created or influenced your identity. Example:

“When I was in elementary school, I had a teacher that helped me value my education. Now, I’m an educator who loves the science of educating others and gaining more knowledge for myself.”

After they receive the example, provide the group with a time limit and let the writing happen.

When the time limit has been reached, have the students write a line underneath this piece of writing and move onto the next tier.

Tier III

Have the students write down 3 questions where the answer is themselves.

Example:

“Who is a proud father? Craig Perez.”

“Who has used poetry to travel the world? Craig Perez.”

“Who loves Hip Hop? Craig Perez.”

When the students complete all three tiers, go over each tier and what happened. After which, ask for volunteers to read their writing. When the volunteers read their writing, encourage them to read all three tiers together, as if it is one poem. Sometimes, the students sound like they completed a full poem.

Further Readings:

Freire, Paulo

Pedagogy of the Oppressed

This is possibly one of our most important texts, and we have built much of our organization's pedagogical practices around it. For this project, we use it to develop the systematic framework for our approach to empowerment, representation, and identity for Pacific Islander youths. Our primary focus is on Freire's ideas about praxis and education that fits the needs of the people. His decolonial approach to education is a fundamental aspect of our educational philosophy.

Teaiwa, Teresia

What Remains to be Seen: Reclaiming the Visual Roots of Pacific Literature

This particular article is a little tricky for our research, because it challenges this idea that the oral traditions are our only form of literacy. In this article, Teaiwa argues that by only focusing on the oral traditions we are essentially ignoring the visual (artistic) manifestations of literacy. She claims that visual art is Pacific literacy. We do not wish to argue against her point, nor do we wish to assert differently. We would merely like to celebrate her perspective regarding literacy and what that word means. She is challenging the paradigm, which is something that roots our organization and programming.

Wendt, Albert

Towards a New Oceania

This writing from Wendt is pioneering the movement in which we inherited. Wendt gives us the foundation to reclaim our histories and our identities, pushing us to take responsibility for our own representation through self-expression. We honor his text by putting his ideas into practice. He believes that if the people of Oceania don't represent themselves, then outsiders will continue to exploit and perpetuate misleading information of Oceania. A new Oceania where Pacific Islanders have their own voices and speak for themselves.

Representation

“They treat our history as fable and fiction. Haven’t we the same right concerning that which they teach us as incontestable truths? They exploit our simplicity and good faith. All their skill is directed towards tricking us; all their knowledge tends only to make us unhappy. If we are ignorant and blind, as they would have us believe, it is because we have learned their evil plans too late and have allowed them to settle here.”

- Maga ‘lāhi Hurao (1700 AD)

In 2009, the Department of Defense announced that they were releasing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed military build-up in Guåhan. As part of an international agreement between the Japanese Government and the United States’ Federal Government, the two countries proposed to decrease U.S. Military presence in Okinawa and Japan by relocating the vast majority of their soldiers to Guåhan. The plan included (among other things) the transfer of over 7,000 Marines and their dependents to Guåhan, the construction of a firing range on ancestral land, the dredging of live coral reef in Apra Harbor, and an estimated 40% increase in our local population. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) turned out to be a 10,000-page document and the community was given 90 days to read and respond to it. Our community was outraged, but our concerns were not being heard.

In an effort to quell the public outcry for justice, the Department of Defense held four DEIS hearings or “Town Hall Meetings” in various parts of the island. The meetings featured an “open house” where they posted display panels manned by DoD officials and staff members of the Matrix Design Group, who was hired to write the DEIS. The meetings were meant to be a public space where our community could learn more about the build-up, the impact it would have on our island, and provide our input and opinions. We were allowed to submit written comments and there was also about an hour set aside for oral testimonies to be heard and recorded. Most people chose to offer oral testimony, especially our elderly who would rather do the culturally respectful thing and talk to each other rather than submit written comments. Oral testimonies were limited to 3 minutes, which many people found to be insufficient. Our elders had difficulty making statements and asking questions in less than 3 minutes, which proved to be frustrating considering the amount of concerns they had about the build-up. How could anyone expect us to respond to 10,000 pages of material in 3 minutes? Ironically, poetry slam rules also impose a 3-minute time limit for poems and so the stage was set for the poets to be the messengers for our community.

As fate would have it, the first DEIS hearing was held at Southern High School, just hours after we had hosted an in-school poetry slam. Poets stayed on campus after school and attended the town hall meeting, teeming for the chance to finally say something about the build-up. Our workshops focus on things that immediately impact the lives of our youth, making relevant connections between social issues and the poetry they write, so Guåhan's relationship with the United States Government were common topics of discussion. Since the build-up had been in the news for some time, the controversy surrounding it wasn't new to the students and many of them had already written poems about it. The poets signed up to speak and delivered articulate, charismatic testimonies which illustrated their displeasure with the federal government and the way that our people and our island have been treated since our first encounter with America. It was incredibly refreshing to hear poetry delivered as testimony in a public hearing setting where our people so often sound angry and struggle to find the right words to paint our frustrations. The federal government always has plans to 'improve' or 'develop' or 'modernize' Guåhan, and since we are an unincorporated territory, our voices are rarely heard. Public hearings like the ones held for the Military Build-up DEIS are not uncommon; federal officials often use them as their primary means of reaching out to the community to gather input from our residents. This practice results in our people being severely underrepresented in their findings. For something like the build-up, their DEIS made it seem as though there weren't many residents who opposed the Military Build-up because there weren't many people who submitted comments during their "scoping hearings," where they gathered input and opinions from the local public. However this time things would be different, because this time our young people came out with something to say. There were definitely a few people who spoke out in support of the build-up, but the vast majority of people who spoke were critical of the proposed plan and the administrative government. The meetings weren't very well attended in the beginning, but as they progressed the numbers continued to grow. People were actually paying attention and taking time out of their day to show up to forums that normally didn't attract many people. We like to think that the poetry had a lot to do with it. Poet-testimonies were featured in the local newspapers and television programs and YouTube videos began to get hundreds, then thousands of views. Young people were spreading the word using social media and working with local organizations like We Are Guåhan, Guåhan NAPU, The Guam Fishermen's Co-op, and the Guam Preservation Trust to raise awareness in our community. Youth were taking direct action to

address community concerns and they were using poetry as their vehicle. Our people were representing themselves in a critical forum where we are normally left out.

The creativity, energy, and spontaneity of the young people who presented testimony during this series of DEIS hearings, were a breath of fresh air for activism on the island. The youth really took charge of these hearings and were able to show how poetry is more than just pretty words strung together using rhyme or metaphor. Poetry was the voice of the younger generation, who were tired of being underrepresented or even misrepresented. They wanted to speak for themselves and they were using poetry to do just that. So if these young people had such a strong desire to speak for themselves, then why have these forums been so sparsely attended in the past? We believe it is because our young people didn't have the proper vehicle to transport their words and feelings. We believe that poetry serves as this vehicle because it allows them to speak and write in a way that fits their critical and creative sensibilities. Poetry provided these local and indigenous youths with the opportunity to be charismatic and articulate. It allowed them to put their words and ideas into well-crafted and clever statements, which ultimately boosts their confidence and gives them the motivation to speak publicly. With this newfound confidence in their messaging, our youth no longer felt like they would be ridiculed or embarrassed about speaking up. In previous scenarios, many of our young people have shied away from these types of public speaking events because they didn't feel like they had anything worth contributing or they didn't know how to say the things they felt. Even among youth who have strong opinions about issues of social justice, many of them will choose to say nothing even when asked because they fear that their words will not be accepted. We are convinced that our pedagogy puts those fears to rest because we provide students with a platform to grow and succeed.

We begin our process by creating a safe space that is dialogical in nature, one in which students feel as though they are actively participating in the administering of their education. Next we work on writing freely without boundaries, and then we revise and edit. We work together in groups to figure out what we like and don't like about the poem and strategize ways to improve it. Then we practice, practice, and practice more, learning the real character and emotion behind our words and what we have written. Once the poem has gone through this rigorous revision and editing process, it is time for the slam! In this scenario, the poetry slam plays a vital role because it serves as a training ground for our young people. The

poetry slam offers a live audience and creates a dynamic that requires our young people to take ownership of their words and ideas. Slams are significant to direct action because they allow our young people a chance to discover their poetry in a new light and they offer a stimulating environment where poetry and critical thinking are celebrated. In a slam, people come to hear poems, but in a DEIS hearing, people come to hear information. For us, the hearings provided the perfect venue for our young people to engage their community using poetry they had written, listen to the thoughts of others, share their opinions, and get involved with government decisions that would impact all of our lives. The practical applications for using spoken word poetry as a means for direct action in your community are endless. Once you have poets engaged in the writing and performance aspects of the process, all you need is a venue for the youth to speak at. In this particular case, we used the DEIS hearings as our venue, but any town hall meeting, public hearing, protest rally, PTA meeting, or community gathering will do. You might even consider using the poems in their written form and have students submit them to the newspaper as letters to the editor or have them submit to a local journal or literary review; you may even consider pressing chapbooks, which are very affordable and can be pressed at your local photocopy shop. You will find that once poets have something to say, all you need to do is create a space where people will listen.



Team Guâhan 2011: (L-R) Alissa Eclavea, Vincent Escobar, Anjelica Bamba, Clayton “Walla” Wai, Georgianna Quintanilla, and Ryan Leon Guerrero (photo by Sinangân-ta Youth Movement)



Team Guâhan 2013: (L-R) Arielle Lowe, Nichole Quintanilla, D’Jra Leigh Celine, Shane Root, and Elvin Miguel Bengco (photo by Sinangân-ta Youth Movement)

“Kaona”

by: Jamaica Osorio and Ittai Wong

Ua ola ka olelo mai ka paiku ana o na pua

Our language survived through the passing of flowers

In 1896

The last reigning monarch of Hawai‘i, Queen Lili‘u‘okalani

Was held prisoner in her own palace

Communication with the outside world was prohibited

Thus newspapers were snuck into her room wrapped around flowers

For months our Queen and her people wrote songs and stories Hidden in Hawaiian, so as to converse
without

the Overthrowing Provisional government knowing

It is because of this we know our history

The language of Hidden meanings

Kaona

The first written Hawaiian poetry

songs and dance were the medium in which we decoded their denotation

connecting connotation through Kaona

speaking of flowers but meaning children

Ua maika‘i ke kalo i ka oha

The branch is a reflection of the taro root

We are a reflection of our genesis

The most intricate euphemisms that ever existed

You had to understand the history and culture

to decrypt this language

Had to dig deeper than dictionaries

beneath esophagus and vocal cords

to grasp the root of the words our people would chant
just to understand their messages

This is kaona

In a time where our freedom of speech was denied
and words needed to be hidden in order to be heard
The language of commonality was no longer an option
So our oral traditions evolved else words would die
Our language survived through the passing of flowers

Ua ola ka olelo mai ka paiku ana o na pua

Our ancestors survived through the passing of tongues

Ua ola na iwi mai ka paiku ana o ka olelo

A dying language wrapped a dying culture

Ua owili ia ka makou keiki me ka olelo

Our flowers

Na Pua

Our Children

Na Pua

The ones we promised to die for weren't surviving

Ke moe I ka make nei ka makou mau keiki

So we sent our stories

No laila ua paiku makaou na moolelo

Wrapped our children in blankets of words

Wahii na keiki me na kapa o na olelo

Hoping they hold on to their meanings

mana'olana makou e pa'a ana lakou i na mana'o

E ho mai ka ike mai huna mai e

O na mea huna no'eau

O ha mele

E ho mai

E ho mai

E ho mai e

So today I pray

for the winds to blow understanding to her people upon the backs of change

I pray

that forgotten stories everywhere flood through

like the white washed ships which stripped our language away.

I pray.

For every foreign tongue relearn its native kiss in language formed as flowers,

spread across the lands we know as our own

hold the salvation of our souls through the wishes begot long ago

Because some meanings should never be hidden

and with every word lost, we lose a piece of ourselves

with every story forgot, we lose a piece of our history

It's time to uncover the past that we may understand our future

Interpret our stories that we may better know ourselves

So listen to me

So listen to me

So listen to me

So listen to me

Listen to me

Existence persists as long as we have language

if we cannot communicate with each other, we cannot survive

He mana ko ka leo, a ina aohe leo a'ohe ola

without language, we have nothing

We must see to it that our language survives like the past, through flowers

Ua ola ka olelo mai ka paiku ana o na pua
E hiki na pua e ola mai ka paiku ana o ka olelo
so our children can survive, through the passing of language

*Ittai Wong
and Jamaica
Osorio
perform at
BNV 2008
(Photo by
Pacific
Tongues)*



*Alaka'i
Kotrys and
William
Giles
perform at
BNV 2008
(Photo by
Pacific
Tongues)*



Representation Workshop

The objective of the representation workshop is to explore how local culture is represented in media and how local people represent themselves. This workshop involves some homework on the facilitators' part. The facilitator needs to gather 10 images that best represent the media's perspective. For example, in Hawai'i, I would use photos of-- the beach, Hula girls, surfers, postcards, etc. In contrast, the facilitator needs to gather 10 images of their own choosing that best represent their perspective of the local culture. I would use images of --Queen Liliuokalani, public school students playing at school, tent city, Pacific garbage patch-- for example. We use the word "local" as a general term so that this workshop can be adapted to the location where it is being facilitated.

Step #1: Arrive 10-20 minutes before the beginning of the workshop. Find the best locations around the room to layout the images. If the classroom permits, I like to rearrange the chairs in a circle with the images in the middle. The images should be printed as big as possible, in color and in focus.

Step #2: Introduce yourself by performing a poem, or playing a poem you relate to. Then start to have a conversation on how outsiders perceive where they live. Is it different that they way locals see themselves? Who portrays their home to the world? Are the ways their community is represented correct?

Step #4: Have the students walk around to observe the images. After they have seen all the images, ask the students to stand in front of the photo that like the most. Then ask the students to write down the first 3 words that come to their head when looking at this image. Next, have the students stand in front of an image that they feel best represents how others perceive their community. Then ask the students to write down the first 3 words that come to their head when looking at this image. Last, have the students stand in front of an image they feel best represents their community. Then ask the students to write down the first 3 words that come to their head when looking at this image.

Step #5: Come together and share the words that they wrote down on their paper. Write the all the words on the board. After all the words are written on the board, the facilitator will read them all out loud to the class. Ask the students to select 5 words from the board. It can be their own words, or someone else's.

Step #6: Have the students freewrite with Pacific Tongues' rules.

1. Time limit (set enough time to write for 3 prompts)

2. Forward Motion
3. Be in the moment
4. Use the 5 selected words in the freewrite
5. Use 3 prompts. We suggest that each prompt is introduced during the freewrite. After a few minutes, ask the students to continue freewriting using a new prompt. Here are prompts that we would use.
 - a. “Welcome to my world, where...”
 - b. “If only you would have known that...”
 - c. “This belongs to...”

After the students have finished their writing have them read it to themselves. Then request volunteers to read their writing out loud. The end of the workshop will conclude by speaking about the importance of representing our own communities. Use poems written in the classroom as examples of the importance of representation.

Further Readings:

Sinangān-ta Youth Movement

Rock the Mic(ronesia)

This is a collection of poetry from youth poets involved in Sinangān-ta Youth Movement in Guåhan. Some of the poets who represented at the DEIS hearing are featured in this collection.

Taulapapa McCullen, Dan

'The Fire That Devours Me': Tahitian Spirituality and Activism in the Poetry of Henri Hiro

In this article, Dan Taulapapa McCullen analyzes the poetry of Henri Hiro and addresses its impact on his social and cultural activism. This article is particularly attractive to our study because Henri Hiro was so well known for the physical side of his activist work (wearing pareau, speaking Tahitian, changing his house), but it was his poetry that gave the messages which really immortalized his work. We use this to focus on the impact of poetry on social and political movements and how this can be applied as a tool for the empowerment of young people.

Dobkins, Rebecca J.

Pacific Voices: Worlds Within Our Community

This is a review essay for a museum exhibit at the Burke Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Seattle, Washington. Though this isn't necessarily about poetry or spoken word, it is about community engagement, which is a huge component of this project. This particular museum exhibit did something exceptional by soliciting community involvement. We use this resource to connect to the work we do in our respective communities and how this comprehensive approach can have a profound impact on the young people we work with.

Empowerment

“When the Hawaiian language was banned at the turn of the century, the clear American intent was to prohibit our speech, including resistance speech; to diminish our literary voice, especially any critical voice; and to obliterate from our minds a unique Native understanding of who and where and how we are. Given this bitter history, my writing, as that of other Hawaiians – whether we write mele or oli or essays or speeches or poetry or scholarship – is a continuing refusal to be silent, to join those groups of indigenous peoples who have been disappeared.”

– Haunani K. Trask (*Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of De-Colonization*)

What is the value of education if it does not serve to empower the people who become educated? For many of us who have spent our formative years in colonial educational institutions, this question can be a double-edged sword. In many cases the mere completion of educational requirements can open multiple doors with opportunities for employment and even upward mobility. However we must ask ourselves what we are really learning in school and whether or not our education empowers us to create positive change in our lives. It has become clear that our schools are producing large numbers of students who are more likely to fill military and manual labor positions than to pursue higher education. We believe that a healthy sense of identity coupled with the desire to represent ourselves are stepping stones to true empowerment for Pacific Islander students. We assert that within the scope of our Pacific Tongues programming, our workshops and events provide young Pacific Islanders with a safe space to develop a strong sense of self, acquire the tools to represent themselves, and most importantly, they have the opportunity to feel a sense of real empowerment by engaging their peers and their community.

The need for venues that empower young people is what makes our poetry slams more than just an entertainment gimmick and more than just a show; it is where the poetry becomes a vehicle for youth empowerment by placing young people in front of an audience, forced to take responsibility for their words. After working with our staff and applying our curriculum to their personal experiences, students are able to present their work to a live audience by performing at one of our poetry events (either a poetry slam or showcase). At this stage, youth are not just merely performing a poem, they are presenting their thoughts, feelings, opinions, and ideas, which have been contemplated, discussed, analyzed, and synthesized into a polished piece of literature. They present their original literature to an audience who may or may not agree with them, which is a highly vulnerable experience. These types of public

performance opportunities truly test our young writers by placing them in high-risk scenarios, but they also give them a chance to gain the approval of a live audience. Additionally, we believe that speaking in this fashion has deep roots in resistance speech. With this perspective in mind, we assert that we do not make art for art sake; we make art for the sake of political liberation and social upliftment. For students who have gone through our program, participating in a poetry slam is more than just getting in the limelight; it is a refusal to remain marginalized and ignored. It is a protest against the silencing and erasing of our peoples and our respective histories.

Poetry has always been a powerful medium for communication among Pacific Islanders. Traditionally it was used to recall genealogy and familial history, to remember legends and stories from the past, and to honor the land and the spirits of those who came before us. In post-colonial times, poetry has served to address issues of identity, social inequality, land tenure, political and cultural independence, women's roles in society, and sovereignty. In this contemporary age of poetry, our young people are desperate for a medium that is suitable to convey the frustrated voices of a generation living under the weight of their colonial administrators. Much like the rise of Hip Hop in the inner cities of America, spoken word poetry offers young Pacific Islanders a medium that is dynamic enough to capture the emotions of a silenced people. It is important to note that all colonized island nations have experienced some form of language colonization in the form of either language bans or educational institutions that only teach in the language of their oppressors.

For our young people, language has become a vehicle for liberation. It is a tool to communicate our dissatisfaction and disapproval of our colonizers, who have not bothered to learn our languages, but have imposed theirs upon us. With this idea in mind, we assert that our Spoken Arts Education curriculum and programs empower young Pacific Islanders by giving them the tools (and confidence) to address a larger audience. In the beginning stages, this looks like a poet performing at a poetry slam, however it eventually evolves into much more than that. For a Pacific Islander student whose parents speak English as their second language, a Western educational institution can be a very intimidating place. They are instantly marginalized by their instructors and taught to be anything but themselves because people who look and sound like them are portrayed as uneducated, unsuccessful, and even uncivilized. So they are taught to speak and write like a group of people that they will never quite fit into. They are taught to

conform to a society that will never really accept them. It is easy to see how so many of our young people become lost in this system, with no real sense of identity or belonging. This paradox creates quite the conundrum for a young person trying to get an education. To spend years learning to read, write, and speak a language only to find that you will never really sound like the authors you have been taught can be a very frustrating thing. In situations like these, poetry offers a way for the oppressed to exercise their voices and remain true to who they are and where they come from.

We met Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner when she was a high school student at the University of Hawai‘i Laboratory School. She was a quiet and unimposing presence, whom harbored a volatile fire inside that could ignite a room full of people in seconds. Kathy was always very shy and reserved, but she was also very interested in poetry and motivated to become a better writer. We began working together in 2006 when she qualified for the Youth Hawai‘i Slam Team, which would represent the state at the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam. Our team ranked among the top 20 teams (out of 70) at the Brave New Voices International Teen Poetry Slam Festival that year. As a teenager, Kathy was always very intelligent and articulate, however she was also very timid and often unsure of herself. Competing on a national level meant that Kathy had to endure rigorous training that tested her writing and performance skills. Though we only trained as a team during the summer of 2006, writing is a process and not an event, and so we continued to remain in touch as a community of poets and more importantly as a community of Pacific Islanders.

The following semester, Kathy left Hawai‘i to study at Mills College in California and eventually received her Bachelor’s Degree before returning to pursue her M.A. in Pacific Island Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. We believe that Kathy’s experience with Pacific Tongues programs and her connection to our Pacific community had a great influence on her identity as a Marshallese poet, her ability to represent herself and her community, and her sense of empowerment to affect change. When Kathy returned to Hawai‘i, she became a part of Pacific Tongues’ first Poet Facilitator Training cohort. This was the beginning of our professional process to create a standard curriculum and documented pedagogy in an attempt to make our programs adaptable, applicable and, sustainable. Kathy was one of the first people to be certified as a Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator, which officially brought her back into the organization to facilitate for other young Pacific Islanders the same pedagogy and programming that she

went through as a young person. Our organization is built on the idea that our youth are our greatest asset to affect change.



Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner performs at a Pacific Tongues poetry slam in Honolulu (photo by Pacific Tongues)

We are invested in empowering young people like Kathy to help push this idea that it is important for our youth to identify as Pacific Islanders and for them to represent themselves in popular media, in industry, and in their professional roles in our communities. Kathy was invited to speak at the United Nations Conference on Global Warming in 2014 and she used her poetry to transcend cultural, geographical, and international barriers to deliver a message from the Marshall Islands. This message shocked the world. Kathy comes from a long line of proud, intelligent women and men from the Marshall Islands; she is not the only person who thinks and feels and speaks these ideas, but she *is* the first Marshallese poet to capture the attention and imagination of the United Nations. It's not about whether or not Kathy's poetry made her rich or famous, it is about how the ability to speak and the platform to be heard are so valuable to people like us. The Pacific Islands are full of intelligent minds with brilliant ideas, but we are seldom heard and rarely listened too. We do not teach poets how to write poetry, we teach them how to speak for themselves. Poets like Kathy have an abundance of words and experiences to fill volumes

of books, but what are words worth when no one is listening? We like to believe that we don't give young poets voices—we simply amplify them.

“Empower” by: Jason Mateo

Why am I discriminated for my presence?

They judge me for my color, my essence

Not for my brain or who is present

It's like they make it into a game

Smile when they stop me from my education

Why am I faced with these types of situations?

Where is this free nation that all races migrated in?

Or are our souls being assassinated

Some teachers, cops or adults don't treat us like humans

But like animals-immigrants-stupid juveniles

I stay calm although I feel empowered

To explode in the next hour

They think I'm the coward

Not knowing it's their mentality I will devour

My desire is to stop them!

Show them I am not a victim

To the system

Knowledge is the key to destroy their foundation

Cause a freedom train is what I'm chasing

While others are faking

Playing a role for their reputation

If I wasn't judged by who they considered Jason
Then good vibes would be part of this section
But I'm an outcast, different from the rest

Why disrespect this?
Is it the way I dress?
Or just life's test?

This system is a universal nemesis
I close my eyes
Clasp my hands
Look up and pray to be bless

Never the less
My space get trespassed
Because being an islander is my culture
I'm looked at wrong and harassed
Even if I'm innocent they want my ass

Our generation of youth is growing fast
Not taking the government's path
But making our own way
With a creative display

I swear with their jealousy
They now have nothing to say
Talking about others and who met the finest chick

Probably found love in paradise live a south pacific flick

These capitalistic screw heads make me sick

If I could I would ask the congress to bend over

For asses I would kick

But I'm told to keep my head up for this society will flip

Soon everyone will be walking down the block

With peace on their lip... lit

In peace everyone will be with instead

Of these mob-type-gang biz

It's not my heart, but my head is ripped

Violence and gun control, they want us to stop it

But they blast whatever they fear in their iris

Put on a disguises to despises us

Lower our self-esteem and confidence

Appoint the brown man a dunce

For people like me they want

So they'll do whatever it takes, daredevil stunts

Is it for fun?

To me... no

It's like at my head there is a gun.

I wrote this poem as a high school student in response to the brash attitudes of teachers on our campus. This poem explores my feelings in this climate. In addition to this being a poem, this was also my outlet. Instead of matching the immature attitudes of our teachers, I found a creative way to respond. This poem was performed at a poetry slam and caught the attention of community activists, educators, and my fellow poets. This poem is an example of how a young critical mind is empowered by writing, performing and standing up for social justice. This poem went through a few versions before reaching completion, but the meaning of the poem only got stronger in its revisions.

In our workshops, students explore their everyday lives, and discover the things that they become passionate about. We facilitate the opportunity for students to express what they feel is most urgent to them. We don't hold the authority of what to write or how to write it. That is why we like to get to know our students where they are in that particular time in their lives. We localize our movement by valuing the experiences our young peoples' lives with the same importance as today's top news story.

It is through diving into the lives of students and the safe space that is created within the spoken word community that encourages empowered voices. When I wrote this poem, it was during the same week of my first youth poetry slam finals. When I shared this poem on the final stage, I was given the highest score of the evening. In addition to winning the poetry slam that night, I was invited to perform this poem at a community event. It amazed me how my personal experience and willingness to write about a challenge that I was facing, impacted my community.

Unlike Kathy, I was an outspoken student who was highly influenced by 80's and 90's Hip Hop music. Plus living in San Francisco, California, I was influenced by the major social movements – Black Panther, Third World Liberation Front, United Farm Workers. Also unlike Kathy, I was not raised with an innate relationship with my heritage. However, it was through poetry that I found more confidence in my identity. This poem was asked to be performed a lots of events, but there is one event in particular that has made a huge impact on my life. At this event, I met Pilipino performers who weaved history of Pilipinas into their artistic message.

Where spoken word poetry becomes the mediums to create a stronger relationship with--ancestors, heritage and tradition—is where Kathy and I relate. We found power in our voice and in our words, but more so we found strength in our community. Our community in turn gave us access to our island stories,

gave us knowledge of self, and gave us the bravery and permission to speak with and for our people. It was through a spoken word community where I found my identity and represented that kinship to empower others.

This poem is where it all began for me. I've been able to travel the world and break the stereotypes set on my people, and our islands. In addition, through spoken word, I was able to navigate through the mixed messages of America, and get a grounded sense of who I am. I was searching to fit into when I was younger, and the more involved I became with spoken word poetry, the more I read, the more I wrote, and the more I performed. Moreover, I was able to empower others in our community to share the diverse stories within our community.

Empowerment Workshop

Go over the rules of the workshop:

1. There are no wrong answers.
2. The standard is yourself.

Begin workshop with a discussion about the difference between a war and a fight.

What are some things that you are willing to fight for?

What are you willing to die for?

What are some reasons people fight? What are some reasons countries go to war?

How are wars ended? What does it mean to “win” a war?

Are wars only fought with guns and bombs and other weapons? Talk about other types of wars like the *Cold War* and the *War on Drugs*. How are these wars different from others? How are they the same?

Create a word palate with the following categories and engage class in a discussion for each section. Record their answers in their respective columns.

| Enemy | Win/Lose (fight/flight) | Forces of Nature | Weapons |
|--|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Who is the enemy in your war/fight?· What threatens you? How?· What makes your life hard or challenging? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">· What do you have to lose/gain by fighting or running?· Why should you fight?· Why should you run? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">· What are forces of nature that you wish you could use to fight with?· What forces of nature symbolize strength?· Which forces are unstoppable? | <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Who or what is on your side?· Who has your back?· What is your advantage?· What do you use to fight? |

Have students select 4 words from both the “enemy” and the “win/lose” columns. Encourage them to use their selected words to freewrite a poem, story, song, rap, etc.

Go over the rules for writing:

1. Stay in constant forward motion.
2. Be in the moment.

Use the following prompt and have them write for about 5 minutes:

“There’s a war going on outside that no one is safe from. You can run, but you can’t hide forever from...”

Have students select at least one entry from “forces of nature” and freewrite for 4 minutes using the following prompt:

“But I speak like a _____”

Students should fill in the blank with their entry choice.

Have students choose at least 3 words from the “weapons” column. They will use these 3 words to write the last section beginning with the following prompt:

“And I’m not alone. My _____ is my army ...”

Have them write for about 3 minutes.

When all the sections are complete, have students share all three freewrites as one poem.

*Note:

This workshop is more of an intermediate level workshop because it addresses complex issues that are very layered and problematic in regards to gender equality. It is vital for the facilitator of this workshop to maintain the safety and integrity of the workshop space by being mindful of the gender dynamic that the topic of “WAR” creates in a classroom. Use guiding questions that prevent the participants from marginalizing women in the room. For example, when the conversation takes a turn toward the physically violent aspects of war, pose questions that prompt students to contemplate the other effects of physical violence like losing a loved one or living in fear of the threat of violence. It is also important to focus the idea of “fighting” on more than just physical means of struggle and confrontation. Try to focus on other creative forms of resistance like protests, political statements, art, music, and civil disobedience. Emphasizing these points when exploring complex metaphors like “fighting” and “war,” will help to prevent the conversation from becoming hyper masculine and threatening to women.

Further Readings:

Hau'ofa, Epeli

Our Sea of Islands

The message of Our Sea of Islands is an empowering one. Hau'ofa challenges every Pacific scholar and resident of a Pacific Island to look at ourselves differently. This essay obliterates the notion that our islands are small and hence our people are small. He pushes us to embrace our history of connection to each other using the ocean as our highway and the amazing feats we have accomplished to settle our islands. We should be a united nation of island people and he encourages looking at the Pacific Ocean as our continent. Hau'ofa places the responsibility of our future in the hands of Pacific Islanders. He informs us that we are the only ones that can best represent Oceania and in turn take care of our islands and our waters, which is our home. We use his motivation to inspire our mission and vision of Pacific Tongues.

Jocson, Korina M.

Taking it to the Mic: Pedagogy of June Jordan's Poetry for the People and Partnership with an Urban High School

In this article, Korina Jocson analyzes the impact of poetry on youth literacy and how critical thinking and civic engagement are both integral parts of educating young people. She writes this based on a qualitative study that utilized June Jordan's Poetry for the People in partnership with Bellevue High School and college student-teachers. The study highlighted the impact of a culturally informed and youth directed approach to education, which is something very central to our pedagogy. We would like to apply these concepts to the analysis of our methods in order to articulate these parallel impacts in a Pacific context.

Organizing A Poetry Slam

Organizing and hosting a poetry slam in your community could be the single most impactful step in getting young people engaged and a Spoken Arts Education movement rolling. Poetry slams bring lots of hype and energy, but most importantly, they bring young people together. This section will give you some guidelines on how to throw your own poetry slam in your school and community.



Competing teams from the 2013 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Team Poetry Slam at the Doris Duke Theater in Honolulu (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

Poets:

Poets are probably the most important part of the show; there can be no poetry slam without poets. More often than not, poets will manifest when there is a reason for them to come out, however it is good practice to line up some poets ahead of time so that you can guarantee a set number of performers. If you are organizing a slam in school, get the word out to the teachers and see if they can send some writers your way. There are always talented writers who are looking for a reason to share their work. If you are planning a community show, use social media to connect with poets so that they can be informed about the date and time of your planned event. You can also reach out to local radio stations to release a PSA (public

service announcement) or a “shout out” as a way of getting some free advertising. Try not to limit yourself to the types of poets/performers that you see on TV or the Internet. Remember that though this is a poetry slam (no music, props, or costumes), it isn’t just limited to poets. You should also reach out to singers/songwriters, storytellers, chanters, rappers, and even comedians. The show should be a welcoming space for anyone with original writing who is willing to share. On the day/night of the show, you will need to have an open sign-up for other performers, which should help you to fill your roster.

Logistics:

You will need a venue that has enough space for poets to perform and for audience members to watch. You don’t necessarily need a stage, but performers should be visible to all audience members, so a stage is definitely recommended. Usually it helps to have chairs and seats available for audience members since poetry slams can be long and you want your audience to be comfortable so that they can concentrate on the performances and give the poets their attention. A personal audio system is recommended so that audience members can hear the poetry. Some venues may be small enough to do a slam without one, but keep in mind that not every poet speaks at the same volume and that the whole point of the show is to hear what poets have to say. Your sound system does not have to be anything really fancy, but generally you want to be able to amplify the voices of your host or MC, the performing poets, and your DJ (if you have one).

It is not necessary to have a DJ for your show, but it is highly recommended. It is really helpful to have music playing between poets, while the scores are tabulated and the host announces the next poet. The music keeps the energy in the room at a high level and keeps the audience engaged in the action. If you do not have access to a DJ, you can simply plug in an iPod or computer to your P.A. system and designate someone to play music between poems. As a rule of thumb, we like to suggest that the DJ play music that relates to the poetry or music that gets the crowd excited. The DJ should cue the music immediately after a poet finishes performing, and continue playing until the next poet takes the stage. It is helpful to have someone other than the host do this job so that s/he can control the volume of the music allowing the host to be heard while the scores are read and the next poet is introduced.

Materials:

Other than a P.A. system, there aren't many things that you need to run a successful show. Here is a short list of things that you should have on hand at any poetry slam:

- Poet sign up sheet
- Score cards for judges
- Score sheet for scorekeeper
- Stopwatch
- Calculator
- Microphone stands

Place the poet sign up sheets up front near the door so that it is in plain sight. Have your host announce where it is and when you will be closing the list. Encourage poets to sign up! The more poets you have, the more poetry the audience will hear. Try to keep in mind that if each poem is about 3 minutes in length, the audience will start to become restless after about 15-20 poems. However if poems are shorter, they can handle a few more.

Score cards are convenient, but if you don't have time to make some, you can easily use note pads and markers or small dry-erase boards for judges to keep score on. Scoring happens live and should be visible to the audience, so make sure that you give judges bold markers to write with. The audience interaction with the judges is a staple of the poetry slam. When scores are read for poets, encourage the audience to react and respond to them, but always encourage them to cheer for the poets no matter what the scores may be.

Score sheets are really for your convenience in tabulating scores. You can simply make your own grid or list on a paper, but someone should be your designated score/time keeper. This person will keep track of the time penalties (if any) and the scores for each poet as the slam progresses. Your scorekeeper should be recording and calculating each poet's score as the host announces them. Additionally, s/he should be responsible for timing each poet in the event of a time penalty. *Time penalties are really made so that every poet has a chance to speak and no particular poet dominates the stage. It is really up to you if you want to use them or not.

Microphone stands are highly recommended so that poets can use both hands to engage the audience. Performers are not required to use them, but they can be helpful especially for poets who want read their poems from a notebook or electronic device. Microphone stands are also helpful so that the mic doesn't have to be passed back and forth between the poet and the host.

Rules:

(Adopted from the National Poetry Slam and Poetry Slam Inc. www.poetryslam.com)

1. Poems can be on any subject and in any style.
2. Each poet must perform work that s/he has created.
3. No props. Generally, poets are allowed to use their given environment and the accoutrements it offers - microphones, mic stands, the stage itself, chairs on stage, a table or bar top, the aisle - as long as these accoutrements are available to other competitors as well. The rule concerning props is not intended to squelch the spontaneity, unpredictability, or on-the-fly choreography that people love about the slam; its intent is to keep the focus on the words rather than objects. Individuals who inadvertently use a prop (for example, a timely yet unwitting grab at a necklace) can be immediately penalized two points if the emcee of the bout deems the effect of the violation to have been appreciable, but sufficiently lacking in specific intent.

4. No musical instruments or pre-recorded music.

5. No costumes.

Time Penalty:

No performance should last longer than three minutes. The time begins when the performance begins, which may well be before the first utterance is made. A poet is certainly allowed several full seconds to adjust the microphone and get settled and ready, but as soon as s/he makes a connection with the audience ("Hey look, she's been standing there for 10 seconds and hasn't even moved"), the timekeeper can start the clock. The poet does not have an unlimited amount of "mime time." Poets with ambiguous beginnings and endings to their performances should seek out the timekeeper at each venue to settle on a starting & ending time. After three minutes, there is a 10-second grace period (up to and including

3:10:00). Starting at 3:10:01, a penalty is automatically deducted from each poet's overall score according to the following schedule:

3:10 and under no penalty

3:10:001 - 3:20 -0.5

3:20:001 - 3:30 -1.0

3:30:001 - 3:40 -1.5

3:40:001 - 3:50 -2.0 and so on

[-0.5 for every 10 seconds over 3:10]

The announcement of the time penalty and its consequent deduction will be made by the emcee or scorekeeper after all the judges have reported their scores. The judges should not even be told that a poet went overtime until it is too late for them to adjust their scores.

Judging:

All efforts shall be made to select five judges who will be fair. Once chosen, the judges will: 1) be given a set of printed instructions on how to judge a poetry slam, 2) have a private, verbal crash course by the emcee or bout manager on the do's and don'ts of poetry slam judging (where they can ask questions), and 3) hear the standardized Official Emcee Spiel, which, among other things, will apprise the audience of their own responsibilities as well as remind the judges of theirs. Having heard, read, or otherwise experienced these three sets of instructions, a judge cannot be challenged over a score. Complaints, problems, and/or disagreements regarding the impartiality of the judges should be brought privately to the attention of the emcee or bout manager BEFORE the bout begins. Having heard and understood the complaint, the bout manager or emcee will then make a decision (also privately) that cannot be further challenged.

Judges for the 2014 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Grand Slam Finals: (L-R) Ishle Yi Park, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Craig Santos Perez, Jamaica Osorio, and Darron Cambra (Photo by Pacific Tongues)



Scoring:

The judges will give each poem a score from 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest or "perfect" score. They will be encouraged to use one decimal place in order to preclude the likelihood of a tie. Each poem will get five scores. The high and the low scores will be dropped and the remaining three scores will be added together. Team scores will be displayed or otherwise publicly available during the bout.

The MC Spiel:

(from the National Poetry Slam www.poetryslam.com)

This is a sample introduction for the MC or host to read before you begin the poetry slam. It is a good way to prepare people for the show and let them know what to expect. You don't have to use this verbatim, but it does give a lot of useful information about what a poetry slam is, and what the audience expectations are. It is very important to have the audience participate in the show. Poetry slams are call-and-response shows, meaning that the audience is encouraged to clap and cheer and even boo the poets.

*This is also a great time for your MC/host to make announcements about the venue and the show. Let them know where the restrooms are, about food or drinks, and instruct them to silence their cell phones, etc.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, today is [say the date clearly including the year] and this is the [event name] coming to you from [City, State]!! My name is [say your name clearly] and I will be your emcee for the evening. The poetry slam is a competition invented in the 1980s by a Chicago construction worker named Marc Smith [“So what!”] in which five members of the audience judge performed poetry. Poets have three minutes to present their original work. The judges will then score the piece anywhere from 0 to 10, evaluating such qualities as performance, content, and originality. The high and low scores of each performance are tossed, and the middle three are added giving the performer their score. Points are deducted for violating the three-minute time limit. We beseech the judges to remain unswayed by the audience and score each poet by the same set of criteria, ignoring whatever boisterous reaction your judgment elicits. Audience: Let the judges know how you feel about the job that they are doing, but be respectful in your exuberance; there could be no show without them. Now let me introduce you to the judges!”

Lastly, it is the MC’s job to introduce poets, and have each one celebrated before and after their performance. The culture of the show is in the hand of the MC. It is up to the MC to keep the energy of the competition while emphasizing on the bravery and intelligence of the youth poets. So it is important that the MC is not saying the names of the youth poets for the first time on stage. Prior to the show, we recommend that the MC facilitate a meeting with the poets. At this meeting, an order of performers can be created. Here is where the poets will draw a number out of a hat to determine when they will take the stage. This is also where the MC can say each name of the poets and correct any butchering of names.

Sacrificial Poet:

Usually poetry slams will begin with a Sacrificial Poet. After all the announcements and introductions have been made, the first poet to hit the stage is the Sacrificial Poet. The Sacrificial Poet is a poet who is not competing in the slam, but will present a poem to the audience that will be judged just as though they were competing. This is an opportunity for both the audience and the judges to calibrate and

get a chance to hear some poetry before the competition begins. It's sort of like a practice round for everyone.

TIPS:

- Meet with the judges and competing poets separately before the show starts so that everyone knows what is going on and what they are responsible for doing.
- The MC should say each poet's name to them before they are called up, so they are pronouncing it correctly on stage.
- A random performance order for the competing poets is recommended.
- If you don't have enough poets, you can go two rounds and have each poet present a 2nd poem.

TIPS for POETS:

There is no set formula that will help you win a poetry slam. The format is not a science and it is flawed because judging is conducted by people, who may or may not be consistent. Ultimately there is no way to predict what judges will respond to and what they won't, however in most cases if you can win over the crowd, you can win over the judges as well. That being said, it doesn't always work out that way. Sometimes the audience may love a poem and performance and the judges may not agree. Either way, it is always good to prepare yourself for a slam and these are a few pointers to help get you up to speed:

- Spend enough time revising and editing your poem so that the writing is the best it can be.
- Memorize your poem -- it's easier to connect with people when you aren't reading off a piece of paper or electronic device.
- Practice, practice, and practice some more! The better you know the poem, the less nervous you will be on stage.
- Make sure your poem is under the time limit -- be sure that you can get through the poem without rushing.
- Practice your delivery in front of a mirror so you can see and hear yourself.
- Know your poem -- understand what kind of emotional delivery you need throughout the poem.

- Speak clearly -- good writing means nothing if the audience can't understand you.
- Remember that you only have 3 minutes -- make the most of it!

Tui Scanlan hosting the 2014 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Team Poetry Slam at Iolani School in Honolulu (photo by Pacific Tongues)





The 8th Annual Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Teen Team Poetry Slam for 2014 was held at Iolani High School on Saturday, November 22nd. The event featured teams from Farrington High School, Waipahu High School, Kaiser High School, and Iolani School. Each team featured between 4-6 poets who competed using original works of poetry with no music, props, or costumes represented each team. It was an amazing event, which showcased inspiring writing and dynamic performances.

Like all the other Interscholastic Teen Team Poetry Slams that Pacific Tongues has hosted, this slam featured fierce competition as each team vied for a chance to be hailed as the current champion. All the teams came with well-crafted poetry and performances that had been rehearsed and sharpened for competition. However, what we found to be unique about this particular show was the camaraderie between poets from opposing teams. From the beginning there was a sense of unity among the young people. Prior to the start of the show, they all congregated in a separate room where they had a chance to meet and greet each other. As with all our events, we gathered all of the competing poets so that we could say a few words and offer a prayer before the show began. This is something that was always an

impromptu and spontaneous thing, however it has really become a part of our tradition during these shows. The students gathered in one big circle and some of our Pacific Tongues facilitators were given the floor to say a few words of encouragement. It seems that no matter who addresses the young people, our message is always the same: your words matter and what you do is important. This is not just about competition and winning the slam. This is about being empowered to speak your truth and to share your words with a room full of people who came to listen to you. Do not waste this opportunity to be heard. You may not always be so lucky.



Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitators address the competing teams before the 2013 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Team Poetry Slam at the Doris Duke Theater in Honolulu (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

The sense of companionship between the competing teams was palatable throughout the night. Every time our host welcomed a team to the stage, the other teams would cheer hysterically, offering words of encouragement and validation. When teams were finished performing, no one cheered louder and more enthusiastically than their competitors. It was truly an amazing sight. At one point, the team from Iolani performed a poem about hugs and how important it is for us to express love by physically embracing each other. After their performance, people in the audience started hugging each other, which created quite

the commotion, but in the midst of the chaos, I noticed that members of competing teams were showing each other love as well. It was a very humbling and admirable experience, which made us very proud of the leadership that our coaches exhibited with their youth poets.

Aside from the strong sense of community among the poets, the competition itself was intense as each team offered poetry that was crafted with the intention of representing themselves with excellence. All the teams were prepared with poetry that was ready for the stage and all of them brought their best during each performance. We believe that coaching was the difference-maker in the quality of



Pete Doktor (Farrington High School teacher) and poets from Team Farrington embrace after winning the 2014 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Team Poetry Slam at Iolani School in Honolulu (Photo by Pacific Tongues)

the poetry that students presented. During the planning stages of this event, we deliberately assigned Pacific Tongues facilitators to coach each team. It was decided unanimously that coaching from our staff was essential to making the show a success. More importantly, the decision to provide coaches for each school was a commitment on our part to the educational value of this process and not just the hype of the event itself. Though most people experienced the Interscholastic Teen Team Poetry Slam in one night, the poets experienced it everyday leading up to the event. They absorbed this experience when they assembled

a team, met each other, discussed, wrote, edited, re-wrote, practiced, practiced, and practiced some more. This process of sharpening their craft and engaging in critical discussions regarding their poetry is what is truly beneficial for our young people. They get the most out of it when our staff facilitates this process, which is why we assigned teams with coaches who had gone through the Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator Training.

This relationship between students and our Poet Facilitators was most evident when the team from Farrington High School took the stage and performed a poem that they wrote for their coach Harrison Ines (a former Pacific Tongues youth poet and national champion). Harrison is also a Farrington High School graduate, who grew up in Kalihi, so coaching this team was definitely motivated by his ties to the community. The poem that the team performed during the competition was a testament to the commitment and dedication that Harrison had for his team. More importantly, it exhibited the type of humanistic and interpersonal relationships that were developed as the team prepared for the slam. Often times, preparation for a competition is more than just practice and composition; it is a growth process in which both student and poet facilitator are actively engaged in critical thinking and learning. Students and coaches learn a great deal about each other during this process because our philosophy is to encourage young people to write about issues that are important to them. In many cases, these issues include family, community, identity, society, peer pressure, and an array of other topics that more often than not, have a direct and personal impact on young writers.

As we have explained in previous writing, Pacific Tongues embraces Paolo Freire's idea that as educators we must value the voices and experiences of our students. They must be empowered and validated by the education they receive in order for them to embrace it. Respectively, their mentors must be willing to meet them halfway and share in this highly personal experience. By doing this, teachers can break down the hierarchy that exists in a traditional western educational system. Harrison Ines was able to do this by presenting himself as a person who is interested in sharing and growing with his students. This required getting to know his students beyond their names, grades, ages, and academic achievements. He had to learn their stories, histories, dreams, failures, aspirations, and fears and find out who they really are as individuals and not just as students with ID numbers. However, this isn't as simple as asking a few basic questions. Harrison had to share his stories as well. Listening to the poem that the Farrington HS team

dedicated to their coach, it was clear that Harrison was able to make a breakthrough. The poem reflected on the growth each student experienced after working with Harrison. They spoke of their fears and inhibitions and the things that Harrison did that made them feel like they had a safe space where they could learn and succeed. However, the poem also addressed some of Harrison's personal struggles and offered their support to him in return for all that he had done for them. This was such a moving and inspiring moment in the slam that illustrated the power of these humanistic connections that were made between our Poet Facilitators and their students.

Another notable aspect of this particular Interscholastic Poetry Slam was that it was completely organized and executed by former youth poets who had gone through our Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator Training. Ittai Wong and Jocelyn Ng were just teenagers when they first started participating in our programming. They both competed at a very high level, winning back-to-back championships with Team Hawai'i at the Brave New Voices International Youth Poetry Slam Festival, which gathers some of the best young poets from across the nation and around the world. Both of them went on to earn Bachelor's degrees and eventually moved home to Hawai'i. They were tasked with organizing this particular event and they did a fantastic job. They were in charge of every aspect of the show including booking a venue, distributing tickets, advertising the show, coordinating with all the teams, assembling a judges panel, booking a DJ and host, and decorating the space. Jocelyn and Ittai performed these tasks responsibly and professionally, which resulted in a smooth, entertaining, and successful event. It was important for our organization to pass the responsibility of putting this event together to our youth in an effort to keep us sustainable. Furthermore, it is essential that our young people take responsibility for the movement of their community. This is their island, and their people, and rightfully so, this is also their show. It was refreshing to see two people, who were on the other side of these events as youth, take the lead as organizers and find success in doing so. Reflecting with each of them before, during, and after the event revealed their excitement to take on this responsibility. Both youth admitted that they had previously taken for granted all the work that goes into producing such an event. They both stated that as youth they thought that they had the hardest job because they were the ones performing in the show. Ittai said, "I used to think that I was so important because I was performing, but after doing this, I realized how hard it is and it really made me grateful for all the work that you guys put into making it happen for us." Though it was definitely

gratifying for us to hear him acknowledge our efforts, it was really more of a proud moment for us to see them come back into the fold in an organizer's capacity. Their efforts highlighted our belief that these events and this movement, truly belong to the youth. They are the ones we do this for and it was amazing to see them do work for each other and give back to a community that has given them so much.

Passing on the organizational responsibility is more than just handing down tasks and hoping that things get done. It is critical that we are able to train and support our young people as well. Jocelyn and Ittai both went through the Poet Facilitator Training and they both met with us and worked with us to prepare for organizing this event. Often times, youth who show exceptional leadership are thrown into the mix and given a lot of responsibility without any real training to prepare them. In Susan Weinstein and Anna West's article, *Call and Responsibility*, they highlight some of the struggles of getting youth involved in such work. In the article, Robin Suhyung Park, a youth poet who became a teaching artists stated, "It was a really rough learning curve. I think that as a youth, I was really excited to take on this position, but when I stepped into it I didn't really understand the gravity of what I was doing. I will say this: at the time I felt like I was fine, but looking back, I realize how much I didn't have the adult support when I was transitioning, which was so key."

Preparing, training, and supporting our young people is such an important aspect of our



Malialina Derden, Sarah Daniels, and Morgynne D'sulueti Tora at the 2015 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Grand Slam finals at the Doris Duke Theater in Honolulu (photo by Honolulu Pulse)

organization's growth. We have been implementing practices that work toward improving this aspect of the professional development for our young people. The Poet Facilitator Training is an essential part of this process. In the training we emphasize Paolo Freire's idea of *praxis* from his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which he describes as the equal balance of action and reflection (131-132). We have made efforts to constantly reflect on what we are doing and have done and use that reflection to inform our action. When working with Ittai and Jocelyn, we encouraged them to talk to us before, during, and after the event, in order for us to best support them as they grew through this process.

Appropriately, Jocelyn organized a poet reflection session, where competing poets met and discussed their experiences with the show. During this reflection, returning poets admitted that in previous Interscholastic Slams, they were very preoccupied with the competition. Many of them claimed that this particular slam was the most fun because they were more focused on the poetry and the community than the competition. This was such a powerful part of the whole experience because it gave these young people the opportunity to work together and build as a community, which made it clear that the poetry slam is not the Mecca, it is merely the mechanism. Additionally, Jocelyn organized this reflection session without any prompting from us. She simply took Freire's theory of praxis and applied it to her work with these young people. This was so significant because it shows how she was able to use her training to constantly improve the work that she was engaged in. She put our pedagogy into practice in a way that shows the potential of this new generation of leaders to take our organization into the future.

After such a successful show, we felt not only an extreme sense of accomplishment, but also a sense of hope for the future of this movement. These young people exhibited an amazing amount of passion and a sense of responsibility that made us confident that this work is in good hands. It was extremely inspiring to watch them take the lead and apply the things they learned to achieve this type of success. We look forward to what the future has in store for these courageous young leaders and we are excited to see them cultivate the skills and talents of the generation that will come after them.

Poet Facilitator Training

One of the most challenging aspects about doing the work of Pacific Tongues is keeping things sustainable. For many years we have done this work as volunteers, contributing our time, energy, and even personal resources to this movement. We have always been a small crew of people with a huge amount of love for our community, however individually we can only do so much. Eventually we had to address how the demand for service in our communities places high levels of stress on all of us. Realistically our goal to build spoken-arts programs around the Pacific region cannot be accomplished without the help of indigenous people. Paolo Freire writes, “It is essential for the oppressed to realize that when they accept the struggle for humanization they also accept, from that moment, their total responsibility for the struggle” (Freire, 68).

In many ways, these trainings were more than just about developing new staff, but more so about “passing the torch,” so to speak. We are engaging this community in a much more meaningful way because we are investing in the local movement on a foundational level. Ultimately, the fate of the local movement should not be determined by outsiders, no matter how purely intentioned. It was our responsibility as outsiders (Melvin from Guåhan and Jason from San Francisco) to recognize that this movement does not belong to us, despite our commitment to keeping it alive. No matter how much we may altruistically support the local community, it must be the local and indigenous youth who lead their own social justice movement for their home. Conducting the poet facilitator training in this way shows our commitment to localizing and indigenizing the work that we do in order to fit the needs of the community it is meant to serve. Freire states, “No pedagogy which is truly liberating can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption.” Though we also represent oppressed populations, we are not the oppressed of this specific community; therefore it is essential that we cultivate local and indigenous leaders to take the helm. We were fortunate to have young people who had previously participated in our program, come back to the organization to get involved and give back. This provided us with the opportunity not only to develop leaders, but also to work with young people who embody the same values of freedom and liberation for their community.

Jocelyn Ng and Harrison Ines were both just teenagers when they came in contact with Pacific Tongues and started writing poetry. Both of them excelled in our Interscholastic Teen Team Poetry Slam and they are both Brave New Voices International Teen Poetry Slam champions. But what is most impressive about these two particular poets is that they exemplify our pedagogy and praxis by remaining committed to making our relationship dialogical. Harrison and Jocelyn went through our Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator Training and both were exceptional candidates who showed a deep understanding for our pedagogy and mission. Their passion pushed them to continually test and impress us with their growth process. These two poets truly embody the idea of creating a balanced relationship through the dialogical process. Like Freire states, action and reflection go hand in hand and one cannot exist without the other. What we admire most about these two young facilitators is that they challenge us to live by this practice. Finding young people who are invested in their community with such commitment to our praxis is a rare thing and we have been grooming these youth to succeed us.

In preparation for the 2013 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Interscholastic Teen Team Poetry Slam, we assigned one Poet Facilitator to each competing team to serve as their coach. This was a deliberate move to create mentorship for competing poets and give each team the chance to compete at a high level. Harrison and Jocelyn were split up to coach separate teams, but this would not last very long. They immediately called a meeting with us to discuss the value of team teaching and collaboration. We were floored! The two of them argued that they should be allowed (even encouraged) to work together because collaboration created a healthy and enthusiastic dynamic between them that the students really responded well to. Additionally, working together helped them to stay focused, motivated, accountable, and most importantly it kept them from feeling burnt out. – WOW! These are our young people learning from our mistakes!

As their former mentors, we couldn't have been more impressed by their maturity and ability to apply our pedagogy to their practice. This was a turning point for our organization because it showed us that our young people are not only capable of speaking for themselves, they are also capable of sharing this knowledge and pedagogy with others. We eventually agreed to let them collaborate and work with each other to coach their respective teams. The result was phenomenal, bringing two very different school populations together to share in self-discovery through critical thinking and writing poetry. Jocelyn

coached Iolani School (a private school in Kaimuki) and Harrison coached Farrington High School (a public school in Kalihi) but they both attended each other's practices and had their teams meet and work together to learn from each other as well. Normally, these two school populations would not interact often, but Jocelyn and Harrison created a space where they had to collaborate and communicate as a community of writers. The Interscholastic Poetry Slam was a success, bringing in enough people to sell out our venue and putting some amazing poetry on stage for their entertainment. At the end of the night, Farrington took the Championship and Iolani claimed second place. More importantly than the outcome of the competition, was the quality of the poetry from these two teams and the camaraderie that they showed each other throughout the night. These two teams competed at a very high level and it was pretty clear that Jocelyn and Harrison were on to something.

After seeing the outstanding work they did for our Interscholastic Poetry Slam, Jocelyn and Harrison were selected to lead a crew of poets for an in-school residency at Moloka'i High School and Middle School in 2015. Moloka'i is one of O'ahu's neighboring islands, which is significantly smaller and less densely populated. The island is about 38 miles long and 10 miles wide, with a population of about 7,400 people. Moloka'i High School and Middle School are the only high school and middle school on the island and has roughly about 300 students (per school), 80% whom are native Hawaiian. Jocelyn and Harrison were already half-way through a residency at Farrington High School in O'ahu, so it was decided that they would take the lead for the Moloka'i Residency as well. We trained these two to run the show, so we were confident that they would be good, but they were flat out amazing!

For the first time ever we were able to sit back and watch someone else facilitate the residency workshops and feel completely confident in their abilities. It was an incredible feeling to watch these Poet Facilitators lead the workshops because they did it in a way that was so different than the way we do it and the way it was taught to us, but their methods were equally effective. This told us that they had internalized our pedagogy, which had allowed them to make the curriculum their own. The success that Jocelyn and Harrison were able to achieve in the classroom was phenomenal and it reassured us that the future of our movement is in good hands. We did not develop the Poet Facilitator Training Program to create cookie-cutter models of ourselves. We don't want our facilitators to run workshops exactly how we run them, we

just want them to embrace the pedagogy and infuse their personalities and styles into the curriculum so that our organization can be effective and diverse.

Jocelyn and Harrison have such contagious energy in the classroom. Each of them brings their own level of excitement and enthusiasm into the workshop space, but what really impressed us most was the way that the two of them worked together, which really pushed our team-teaching philosophy to its full potential. We have always promoted team-teaching and collaborative development, however Jocelyn and Harrison were able to take it to the next level. They not only planned together, but they practiced together so when they got in front of a live classroom, their delivery was crisp and sharp. It was like watching them perform a poem together, but they were facilitating a workshop, moving seamlessly through concepts, weaving the conversation effortlessly between each other and the students. The Moloka'i Middle/High School residency was their proving ground, and Jocelyn and Harrison proved that they were ready to take charge.

It was extremely important for us to engage young people in this community to develop them as leaders, but even more urgent was empowering them to take responsibility for it as well. In his essay entitled *Pasts to Remember*, Epeli Hau'ofa writes, "I believe that in order for us to gain greater autonomy than we have today and maintain it within the global system, we must in addition to other measures be able to define and construct our pasts and present in our own ways. We cannot continue to rely on others to do it for us because autonomy cannot be attained through dependence." As an organization we are committed



Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitators Harrison Ines and Jocelyn Ng perform at the 2015 Youth Speaks Hawai'i Grand Slam Finals at the Doris Duke Theater in Honolulu (photo by Pacific Tongues)

to empowering Pacific Islanders to represent themselves, which is something that has been taken from all oppressed people around the world. We are historically represented through the lens of our colonizers, who often depict us as lazy, violent, uneducated, and uncivilized. Not only are these descriptions problematic, but they were created without our knowledge or approval in an attempt to belittle us and exhibit power over us. We must assert our right to represent ourselves and take ownership of the way that people see us and the way we see ourselves. For this reason, our Poet Facilitator Training deliberately connects Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and Epeli Hau'ofa's *Pasts to Remember*, as a way to emphasize the importance of identity, representation, and empowerment for Pacific Islanders. We train our facilitators to engage young people in discussions that further their understanding of their own identities and empower them to represent themselves. This is such a simple concept that speaks volumes for young people who have been raised to believe that they are not as good as their western counterparts. Many Pacific Islanders grow up thinking that they can only succeed in this westernized society by playing sports or joining the military. We have been conditioned to believe that we are inferior and we have been made to be dependent on our colonizers. Though this is most easily observable through an economic and political lens, it is important to note that especially for our younger generations, this is being done through the educational system.

Our young people are failing in the classroom because, as Freire states, "Education is suffering from narration sickness" (Freire, 71). He argues that, "This relationship involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). The contents, whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified" (Freire, 71). Our Pacific Tongues pedagogy stresses the importance of identity, representation, and empowerment and so our poet facilitators are trained to encourage and motivate young people to get involved and play an active role in their education. We push our students to speak and be heard. This begins upon first contact with young people.

We begin every outreach and workshop with performed poetry. On the surface, this seems like entertainment, however this is a deliberate show of faith that we are not going to ask young people to do something we are not willing to do ourselves. Furthermore, the poetry (in spoken form) is very moving and impactful, which demonstrates for young people the power of the spoken word and reconnects us with our

oral traditions. We want Pacific Islander students to see people who look like them using language in a very powerful way. This shifts the dynamic in the classroom, in an attempt to motivate (and eventually empower) them to create poetry or writing that represents them. We also utilize the personal narrative as a way for young people to take ownership and responsibility for telling their own stories. We see this as an essential part of our educational praxis because it gives young people the opportunity to be the authority on their personal history, and ultimately the history of their people. Though upon initial observation, this may look simply like young people writing and talking about themselves, it is much more than that. Epeli

Hau'ofa writes in *Pasts to Remember*:

We who are more fortunate, cannot afford to believe that our histories began only with imperialism or that as peoples and cultures we are the creations of colonialism and Christianity. We cannot afford to have no reference points in our ancient pasts – to have as memories or histories only those imposed on us by our erstwhile colonizers and the present international system that seems bent on globalizing us completely by eradicating our cultural memory and diversity, our sense of community, our commitment to our ancestry and progeny, and individualizing standardizing, and homogenizing our lives, so as to render our world completely open for the unfettered movement of capital and technology. We must therefore actively reconstruct our histories, rewrite our geography, create our own realities, and disseminate these through our educational institutions and our societies at large. This is absolutely necessary if we are to strengthen our position for surviving reasonably as autonomous peoples within the new international order.

Hau'ofa illustrates how taking ownership of our own stories and histories and empowering our people to do so is critical not only for our education, but for our survival. We are underrepresented and sometimes completely absent from the Western Literary Canon, which dominates reading lists in our schools. Most Pacific Islander students have never read or heard any literature from Pacific authors. It is tragic that our young people have no literary role models. It is unrealistic to expect these students to value literature and literacy if we are constantly force feeding them the writings of old, dead, white men who don't represent them. Even in the continental United States, there has been a push to include more African American and Latino writers in the classroom in an attempt to add "color" and "diversity" for Black and

Latino students. What about *our* kids? Do they not deserve the same? We propose to take this a step further: we not only want more Pacific Literature in the classrooms, but we also want to help our young people become a part of the Pacific Literary Canon.

Bringing young voices from the margins to the masses is not just our trademark; it is our commitment. But this does not end when a young poet gets a standing ovation or wins a poetry slam. Putting poets on stage is not just entertainment; it is empowerment. Giving a poet a moment on stage is an essential part of the process because it gives young people the opportunity to recognize the potential power of their own voices. However words must be followed with action or they become empty words and so we know that we must empower our young people with more than just stage time. The Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator Training exists to provide these young poets an opportunity to give back to their communities but it also provides them with a framework to teach by learning an educational philosophy that is rooted in empowering young people. Epeli Hau'ofa claims that education is a privilege and that those of us who are lucky enough to have this privilege must then use it to uplift those who do not. We believe that the young people we serve must take ownership of this movement. Those who are fortunate enough to be blessed with true education or talent must use their privilege to empower others who are also oppressed. The Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitator Training is our organization's commitment to ensuring that the movement is in the right hands and will always serve its community properly.

Pacific Tongues Poet Facilitators Jocelyn Ng and Harrison Ines conduct a professional development session for Moloka'i High School and Middle School teachers (Photo by Pacific Tongues)



Further Readings:

Weinstein, Susan & West, Anna

Call and Responsibility: Critical Questions for Youth Spoken Word Poetry

This article is important to us because it addresses the practice and professionalism of youth spoken word movements around the United States and different ways that youth are prepared (or not) to do this work. We are very mindful of creating a system of support for our youth who want to continue to work as facilitators and organizers. This article helps to keep us critical of our own praxis and what we are doing to maintain a high level of ethical practices and professional development within our organization.

Hau'ofa, Epeli

Pasts to Remember

This essay helps to keep us rooted in our respective Pacific histories. Hau'ofa writes how damaging it can be to have our histories written by others and then retold by them to fit their agendas. Though this article doesn't have a whole lot to do with poetry, it is relevant to us in principle to because it helps to inform our pedagogy, which is committed to remaining connected to our histories and using it for the advancement of our people. It is imperative that our Poet Facilitators understand the importance of embracing Pacific history and using it as a liberating tool.

Conclusion

This educator's guide is simply created to encourage the use of Spoken Arts Education programming for the education of Pacific Islanders. Spoken word poetry and other oral traditions, dialogue, critical thinking, and community engagement should be part of everyday culture in our islands. In addition, this guide was developed in the spirit of social justice. We believe that young Pacific Islanders have significant stories to share. However, we know that it is not enough to just provide a space for voices to be heard. We value the process to create passionate, intelligent, and conscious poetry that can be excellently performed. What is excellent?

When our peers from neighboring islands use this guide to create a local Spoken Arts movement, they will create their own standards of excellence. Although we will be critical of cookie cutter performances, we want every poet to find distinctness in their voice. We believe that when leaders of our communities witness the power of this pedagogy and implement it, that their Spoken Arts movement will naturally develop. When a young Pacific Islander identifies with spoken word poetry, and is willing to develop their voice and story to be represented, that they will feel empowered to be leaders in their community and be better students of learning.

We are not naïve to think that this guide is going to save Oceania. This guide is very similar to our poetry slams – it's not the Mecca, it's the mechanism! This is not meant to be a Spoken Arts Education Bible, it is meant to be a mechanism to cultivate an Oceanic community of leaders, spoken words artists, educators and students of all ages. We don't expect for every island to have a Pacific Tongues organization, but we will facilitate Pacific Tongues programming on the Hawaiian Islands for communities from around the Pacific to learn from, grow with, and help cultivate their own.

Milestones:

2005 Youth Speaks Hawai‘i program introduced to youth of O‘ahu

2005 Started Free After School Spoken Arts Workshops at Arts at Mark’s Garage in Downtown Honolulu

2005 2nd Saturday, a monthly youth poetry slam was formed in Honolulu

2005 1st Youth Poetry Slam on O‘ahu, Hi

2006 1st Interscholastic Slam on O‘ahu, Hi

2006 Sinangân-ta Youth Movement was formed on Guåhan

2007 1st Youth Speaks Hawai‘i publications Spoken Words chapbook and Youth Speaks Hawai‘i Vol. 1 (Independently published)

2007 Sinangân-ta Youth Movement starts a monthly youth slam: Write Direction Poetry Slam in Guåhan

2008 Team Hawai‘i are International Youth Poetry Slam Champions- Brave New Voices: Washington DC

2009 Team Hawai‘i are 2x International Youth Poetry Slam Champions- Brave new Chicago, IL

2009 Jamaica Osorio performs at White House Poetry Jam for President Obama

2010 Featured at Kotuia Youth Conference in Aotearoa

2010 Sinangân-ta Youth Movement started Free workshops at various public schools in Guåhan

2010 1st Youth Advisory Board in Honolulu, Hi

2011 HI Poets Society established at University of Hawai‘i , Mānoa

2012 Aotearoa collaboration South Auckland poets collective

2012 Spoken Word Symposium: Building a Community of Oceanic Voices and Performances at Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies Halau o Haumea at University of Hawai‘i, Mānoa

2012 Grand Opening The Creative: 1116 Smith St. Honolulu, Hi (Chinatown)

2013 Facilitated programming and performances in Palau at Koror State Capital

2013 Rock the Mic(ronesia) a collection of Sinangân-ta Youth Movement poems was published in Guåhan

2013 Pacific Tongues receives 501c3 on O‘ahu

2014 Facilitated programming in Papua New Guinea

2014 Kathy Jetnil- Kijiner performed for the United Nations

2015 Celebrate 10 years of programming

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